LONG LIVE VINYL

ISSUE 15
JUNE 2018
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DESIGNING OASIS
Brian Cannon on creating classic indie sleeves

Classic Album
Murder Ballads

THE TRIP
Utrecht 2018

TRANSGRESSIVE
How to start a label with £1,000

45s THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

THE 45 SINGLES EVERY COLLECTOR SHOULD OWN

+ MOST WANTED + MOST VALUABLE

GAZ COOMBES
"It's been the most creative time of my life"

BEACH HOUSE
"The older you get the more punk you become"

+ FREAKBEAT TOP 10

FEATURED
Gengahr
Simon Raymonde
Parquet Courts
The Essential Clash
Budget turntable guide

REVIEWED
Father John Misty, Love, Courtney Barnett, Gomez, Chvrches, Josh T Pearson, Neil Young, Brian Eno, Belly

THE MAGAZINE FOR VINYL LOVERS

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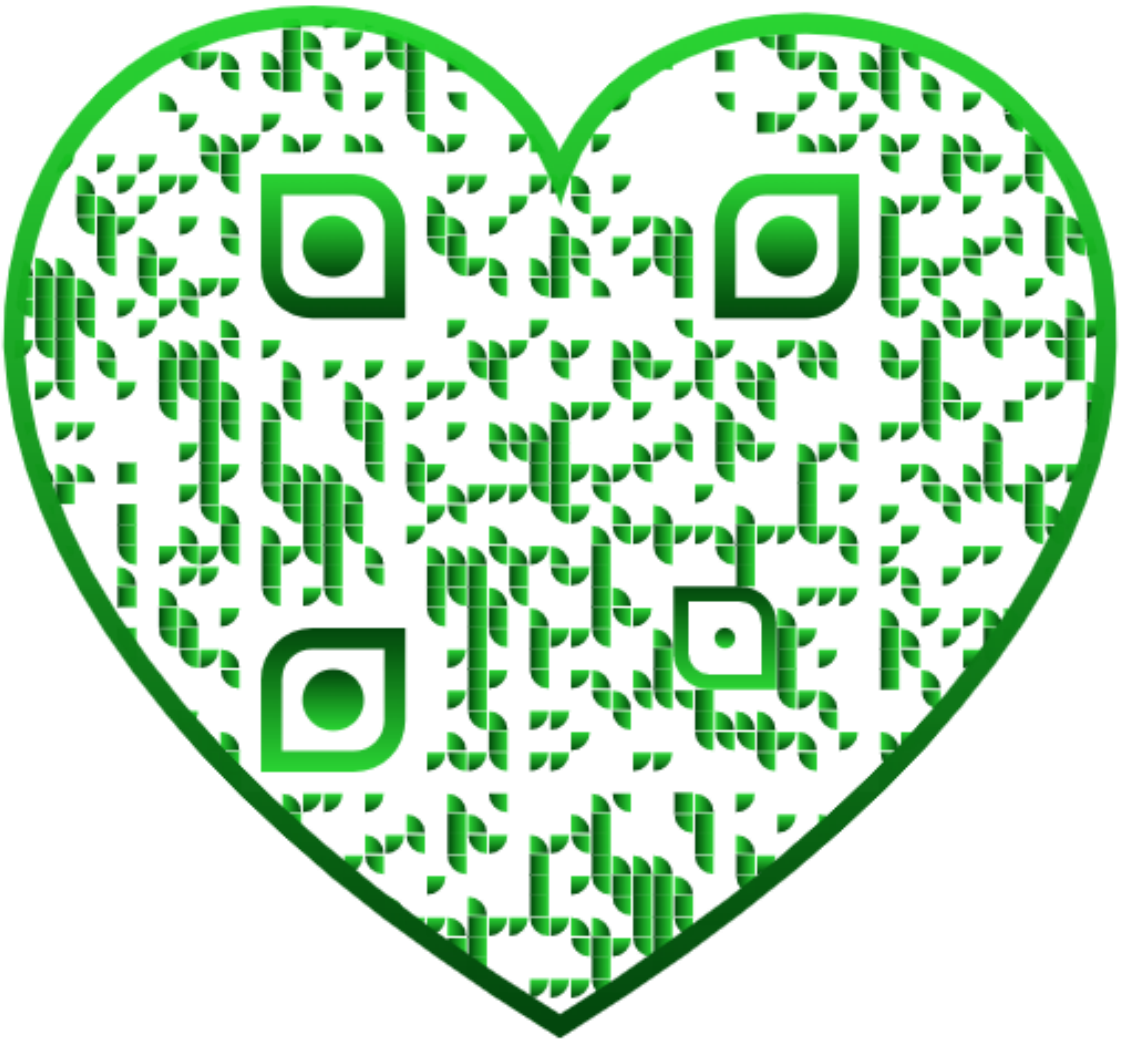

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Welcome...

In 1979, 89 million 7" singles were sold in the UK. Just take a second to digest that figure – an all-time high. It seems a staggering number in today's more austere times for the format. Yet we're always being told by commentators of all persuasions that we live in times of dwindling concentration spans, with social media, Netflix, Spotify and all manner of other attention-seeking media competing for our time.

So, against that backdrop, surely the time is right for the three-minute thrill ride of the 45 to rise again. Could the once-dominant 7" follow the vinyl LP in making a comeback? Sadly, it's a bit of a stretch – certainly with prices for new singles so high, and fewer and fewer copies on offer to shops, while YouTube and Spotify provide instant, free, gratification. But, for most of us, 7"s were the gateway drug – an intoxicating first step into the world of record collecting. This month, we celebrate that fact, rounding up – fittingly enough – 45 singles that changed the world. Think back to the first time you heard Hal Blaine's drum intro ushering in the perfect pop of The Ronettes' *Be My Baby*; or Dave Davies' pulse-raising distorted powerchord riff at the start of The Kinks' *You Really Got Me*; or the prophetic brilliance of Giorgio Moroder and Donna Summer's *I Feel Love*, which prompted Brian Eno to tell David Bowie: "I have heard the sound of the future". The role of the now-humble 7" in shaping music history should never be forgotten. Turn to p43 to read our full Top 45, plus the UK's most expensive and most collected 7"s, a 1960s Freakbeat Top 10 and the opinions of some industry experts on what the future holds for 45s.

The role of the now-humble 7" in shaping music history should never be forgotten

Returning to LP matters, we speak to Gaz Coombes, Parquet Courts and Beach House about their new albums and take an in-depth look at Nick Cave's dark, enchanting classic *Murder Ballads,* while our Essential feature rounds up 40 Clash classics.

We also hear how three vinyl die-hards started a label using £1,000 syphoned off from a student loan, and went on to sign bands such as Foals, Bloc Party, At The Drive-In, Alvvays and Let's Eat Grandma, becoming one of the UK's most prolific producers of talent. Transgressive are DIY heroes.

Finally, if you've ever wondered what goes on inside the world's biggest record fair – The Mega Record & CD Fair in Utrecht – check out this issue's The Trip feature, as we finally let obsessive collector Mark Elliott loose to join 25,000 cratediggers from all over the world and try to emerge solvent. Enjoy the mag.

Gary Walker *Editor*

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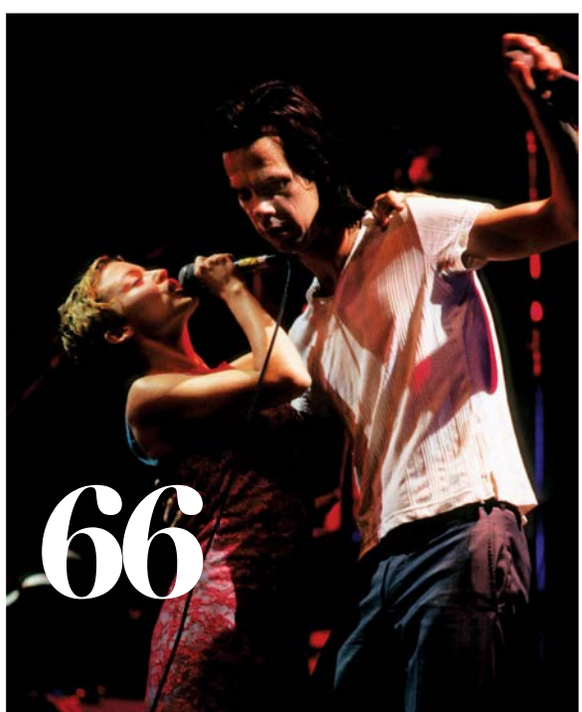
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LONG LIVE VINYL

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LONG LIVE VINYL

The *Long Live Vinyl* team pick their favourite 45s…

Gary Walker
Be My Baby
The Ronettes

Owen Bailey
Loose Fit
Happy Mondays

Jonny Highett
Paranoid Android
Radiohead

Andy Cottle
Golden Brown
The Stranglers

Ian Peel
Be Near Me
ABC

Meet our expert contributors…

Simon Raymonde
Simon was the bassist and keyboard player in the Cocteau Twins; he's currently in Lost Horizons. He launched the independent label Bella Union in 1997. His label has been a home to bands including Fleet Foxes, The Flaming Lips, Midlake, Father John Misty, John Grant, Explosions In The Sky and Lanterns On The Lake. He's also produced many great albums.

Gary Tipp
Gary has been collecting vinyl since time immemorial and still can't walk past a charity shop without going in on the off chance there's a mint treasure nestled somewhere in between the easy listening and the obligatory copy of Paul Young's *No Parlez*. He's also been writing words for magazines for longer than anyone can remember.

Daniel Dylan Wray
Daniel is a freelance music writer based in Sheffield. He writes for *The Guardian*, *VICE*, *Pitchfork*, *Uncut*, *The Quietus*, *Noisey* and several others. He will be forever poor because he spends too much money on records. He can be found playing said records in Sheffield, often making small children cry by playing Einstürzende Neubauten on a Sunday afternoon in a pub.

Jonathan Wright
Jonathan began writing about music in the late 80s. He's interviewed such singular talents as Shaun Ryder, Edwyn Collins and Richey Edwards. He's written for *The Guardian*, *Classic Pop* and many others. Jonathan edited *Adventure Rocketship! Let's All Go To The Science Fiction Disco*, a book of essays about the interface between geek culture and music.

Neil Crossley
Neil is a journalist and editor who writes about music and TV. His work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Independent*. Neil is also a singer-songwriter and was part of the Tony Visconti-produced project International Blue, a 21st century take on the noble art of pop crooning. Neil fronts the band Furlined, described as "Morrissey meets Americana".

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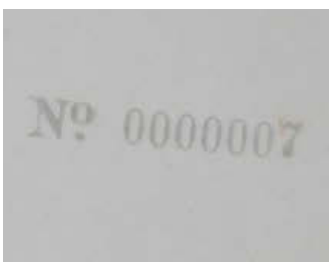

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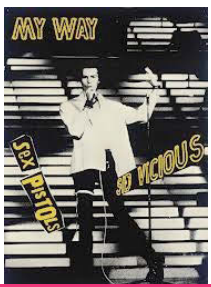
SOLD £11,000



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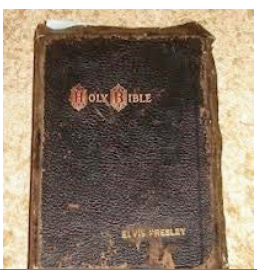
Elvis Presley's Bible



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THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

Images from the 49th Mega Record & CD Fair in Utrecht, the Netherlands, where aside from 550 dealers from all over the world, the attractions included the 45 Years Of Disco Fever exhibition, a live-music stage and Omega Auctions' rare vinyl sale.

FAC51 THE HAÇIENDA
The Monday Club
THE STONE ROSES
+KING OF THE SLUMS
2 EACH OR 3 FOR 5

David Bowie
ROCK N ROLL SUICIDE
FRANCE 1974
JAPAN 1980
SPAIN 1977
FRANCE 1972

OMEGA
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40P EACH

KONITZ-SOLAL
FESTIVAL DE JAZZ
sonny rollins
CHET BAKER
RARE STUFF
IMPULSE
&
BLUE NOTE

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On the record

GARBAGE RECYCLED

1990s alt-rockers Garbage release two new 20th-anniversary reissue editions of *Version 2.0* – the record Shirley Manson calls the "quintessential Garbage album"

***Version 2.0*, described by Shirley Manson as "the quintessential Garbage record", gets a 20th-anniversary vinyl reissue on 22 June. Released on Stunvolume, it's available as both orange-vinyl double-LP and a deluxe edition, three-disc set which adds all 10 of the B-sides of the era and a poster and stickers.**

A selection of these B-sides are set to be aired live, along with a rendition of the full album, when the band play a short tour of the UK in September. The highlight is sure to be album- and 90s-era live-show closer, *You Look So Fine*.

"*Version 2.0* is the sound of a band growing up, evolving, and more than anything, gaining confidence," says Garbage's drummer and co-producer Butch Vig, who's on the same page as Manson on the LP's place in their back catalogue. "When we started recording, we made a conscious decision to not reinvent ourselves, but rather take everything we learned from our debut album and filter it through the new digital technology we were grappling with. Sonically, the album has moments of razor-sharp clarity and soft beauty. Indeed, it's possibly our best album."

Black Boxed

Metal doesn't get heavier than this. After last year's *The Ten Year War* album collection (now regularly fetching in excess of £350 on eBay), Black Sabbath turn their attention to their singles output with another lavish boxset, *Supersonic Years – The Seventies Singles*, out 8 June.

The boxset compiles the singles and radio mixes of a band wedded to the album format. "We don't go into the studio to make singles," Tony Iommi memorably told the *Disc And Music Echo* in 1971. "We make LPs only."

Such rules make for rarities and of the 10 7"s, four have rare single-edit versions of well-known A-sides: 1970's *Iron Man*, 1973's *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* (Edited Version), 1975's *Am I Going Insane (Radio)* Single Edit and the German Single Edit of 1978's *Symptom Of The Universe*, on the B-side of the final disc, *Hard Road*.

The new Black Sabbath boxset, *Supersonic Years – The Seventies Singles*, features rare single-edit versions of classic A-sides

VINYL AMNESTY
The makers of new white rum, BemBom Rum Do Brasil, want your bad vinyl in exchange for a T-shirt, as part of their vinyl amnesty. www.bembombrasil.com

FRENCH GROOVES
***Swinging Mademoiselles* from Silva Screen (on neon-pink vinyl) compiles rare tracks from 60s chanteuses. It features Jacqueline Taïeb, Katy David and others.**

SOUNDS FOR PICTURE
Legendary soundtrack label Varèse Sarabande has launched the Varèse Vinyl online shop: see the store at www.varesesarabande.com for info on limited editions.

HEATHER FORECAST

Contemporary pianist James Heather's *Stories From Far Away On Piano* is out this month via Ahead Of Our Time, on 180g vinyl with a spined, matte sleeve.

NEW WHALES

Having disbanded three years ago to focus on solo projects, a fan-led campaign has lead to the reissue – for the first time on vinyl – of Noah And The Whale's first two albums. 2008's *Peaceful, The World Lays Me Down* and 2009's *The First Days Of Spring* are out this month on 180g vinyl.

Simon says

SIMON RAYMONDE

A family member's passing reminds us that music plays a role in our lives far beyond entertainment – it's a link to the past, a bond between families and a healing force…

My mother passed away a couple of weeks ago, and while it will come as no surprise that a very sick woman of 92 was unable to hang onto this fragile thread, it was utterly heartbreaking to see her ultimate demise. Genetics prepares a lot of animals for life – think of the wondrous sight of foals standing and stumbling around within seconds of birth – but our abilities to cope with death aren't as compelling to witness.

It got me thinking about my own mortality, and that final chapter that has so many alternative endings. This week, of all weeks, I had my birthday – and a surprisingly beautiful weekend with my brother and my kids, organised by my amazing wife Abbey, taught me a big lesson I was very grateful for.

For the last six years, I've been working on a compilation album of my father's work. Ivor was the love of my mother's life, and of his sons' and daughters', too, but died suddenly in 1990, leaving us all bereft. Mum never dated again, nor ever expressed an interest in it. For sure, he was an amazing husband to her, and a lovely sweet man to have as a father. Growing up, I was always fascinated by his work, and knew the headline names he worked with from the 60s in his heyday; writing songs for Dusty Springfield, arranging orchestras for The Walker Brothers, David Bowie, etc. But it was only when I got to about 50 myself I felt I needed to know way more about his work than I did. Mum knew some stuff, of course, but her memories weren't as reliable as they once were, and during some late-night trawling of YouTube and Discogs, I started to discover not just a few more records he worked on, but literally *thousands*. It was a revelation and an education. I began collecting as much as I could, and now have a whole shelf in my record collection dedicated to his vinyl.

My good friend Kieron Tyler, an excellent writer for *Mojo*, *The Arts Desk* and others, is also an expert in reissues, having worked on so many; and he knew a lot of the pitfalls and obstacles. He helped me enormously with making this compilation idea a reality; I wouldn't have managed to do it without his help. The licensing and sourcing of the original material took forever: his patience was beyond the call of duty. It feels special to finally be able to put out this well-overdue retrospective of my father's life's work in music, on my own label.

Recognising my old man's catalogue of work feels like one of the most important releases of the last 21 years of Bella Union

When my brother came over to the house this weekend for my birthday, he came into my music room – and while he knew about the compilation, he hadn't seen the tracklisting or heard it in its entirety, and we had a marvellous time listening to the tracks and talking about mum and dad and our own memories of them both.

With my sons Stan and Will over as well, this day was, despite the sadness we all felt about mum, one of the best we've ever had as a family. We laughed a lot and, listening through this double album of some of dad's work (even a double album is just scratching the surface), we shed a few tears, too.

Music has dominated my life, my father's life before me, and is looking likely to dominate at least one of my sons' lives, too, and what an honour it is to be able to spend your life's work doing something you love.

Recognising my old man's catalogue of work feels like one of the most important releases of the last 21 years running Bella Union, as it allows me to publicly acknowledge the massive debt I owe him. Not just musically, but in his wisdom. "Don't ever do a job you don't feel a passion for," he'd say. "I don't care what you do, as long as you enjoy it. If you love roadsweeping, then be a roadsweeper, and I will be thrilled." That always stuck with me.

It doesn't come naturally to me to express sad emotions, and while I hope to steer clear of just posting a sad-face emoticon to articulate my state of mind, I had wondered why – whether it was just the 'stiff upper lip' thing, or if there were other things going on? I also realised recently I've always been drawn to melancholic music, as a writer and a listener, and looking back at the 21 years of Bella Union, clearly also as a curator. During that time, I've often thought: 'Why am I doing this?', and now I think I know.

Losing both parents is something none of us are prepared for, but most of us will have to go through, and for sure, I'm still figuring it all out. But I'm starting to see that by working through the pain, there comes an understanding. I listened to Cocteau Twins' *My Truth* while I wrote this, and if you listen to it now, you will understand why *Paradise: The Sound Of Ivor Raymonde*, a double-vinyl compilation of his work, will be out this summer on Bella Union. ●

SIMON RAYMONDE ***is currently in Lost Horizons and was the bassist and keyboard player in Cocteau Twins. He founded the independent record label Bella Union.***

CROWD AND PROUD
Current vinyl projects on PledgeMusic include Jah Wobble's new album with Bill Laswell; the first new LP in 20 years from L7 and a new LP from Electric Soft Parade.

LATEST, GREATEST
Warner Music's Greatest Hits On Vinyl campaign in June will re-press some rare Best Ofs, ranging from The Notorious B.I.G.'s *Greatest Hits* to *The Best Of Bread*.

NEURHYTHMICS
Eurythmics' back catalogue is being re-pressed on 180g. Alas, there are no bonus tracks or new liner notes. The first three are out now, with a second wave to follow in July.

MUSIC FOR INSTALLATIONS
ENO'S GALLERY MUSIC ON VINYL

Brian Eno has collaborated with designer Nick Robertson for the release of a lavish nine-LP boxset of his music for art galleries and installations, out this month. With content dating back to 1986, none of which has ever been released on vinyl, *Music For Installations* also includes a 64-page book with a Plexiglass cover, and a download card.

…*Installations* finds Eno in ultra-ambient mood; the perfect warm-up to long-requested reissues of his original quartet of numbered *Ambient* LPs, which celebrated their 40th anniversary this spring. "If you think of music as a moving, changing form, and painting as a still form," Eno explains, "what I'm trying to do is make very still music and paintings that move. I'm trying to find in both of those forms, the space in between the traditional concept of music and the traditional concept of painting."

New Gear

Launched on Kickstarter earlier this year, Gearbox Records' first foray into turntables is now shipping at £499. It's striking, with see-through casing and a glass platter. But the visible circuit board carries some surprises, not least 'track tagging': similar to an in-built Shazam-style app that lets you add music from vinyl to streaming platforms. "With the turntable connected to the Gearbox Wi-Fi network, your phone receives automatic push notifications with the artwork of the track playing," says Gearbox's Darrel Sheinman.

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For more info, visit musicboxdesigns.com. For a chance to win, go to:

longlivevinyl.net/musicboxcomp

…and answer the following question:

Where is the twice-annual Record Planet Mega Record & CD Fair held?

A The Netherlands
B Germany
C USA

Terms & Conditions

The closing date is 12.00am GMT 7 June 2018. The editor's decision is final. This competition is open to over-18s only. Your chosen box design must be supplied as a high-res image file and cannot be a copyrighted image or logo. For full terms and conditions, please go to anthem-publishing.com/competition-tcs.

CRATE DIGGING WITH... Tony Banks

From blues to rock to classical, Tony Banks' influences are far-reaching: unsurprising, given the keyboardist and songwriter is approaching the 50th anniversary of his first release, Genesis' prog-igniting *From Genesis To Revelation*. Right now, he's firmly in classical mode, which influenced some of the records he pulled out during our crate-digging session…

VARIOUS (OST)
THE KING AND I

"The first LPs I heard were the soundtracks from the musicals of the day. This one still works for me; I feel Richard Rodgers has been a definite influence on my writing. Standout track? Possibly *Something Wonderful*."

THE BEATLES
WITH THE BEATLES

"The first album I bought – every track's as good as a single: not normal for records at the time. For me, The Beatles were the best; the way they developed from '63 to '69 carried me through my teenage years."

THE BEACH BOYS
PET SOUNDS

"This came from nowhere, an extraordinary collection of songs that broke so many of the rules. Unusual chord sequences and totally original arrangements, yet still somehow very accessible. Brilliant."

SIMON & GARFUNKEL
BOOKENDS

"All their albums are wonderful, but this is their masterpiece. *America* is one of the great songs, both musically and lyrically. I had such a romantic idea of the New Jersey Turnpike, until I actually travelled on it…"

THE NICE
THE THOUGHTS OF EMERLIST DAVJACK

"A bit of a cheat, as The Nice were never captured successfully on record. Seeing them at the Marquee Club in 1967, still the best gig I've been to, convinced me playing live was something I might like to do."

U.S.S.R. SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
SHOSTAKOVICH SYMPHONY NO. 10

"It wasn't till the end of the 60s, at uni, that I rediscovered classical music, through this. I'd forgotten just how exciting an orchestra in full flow could be."

VARIOUS (OST)
DEATH IN VENICE

"My first experience of Mahler. The key piece on this soundtrack, the *Adagietto* from the *5th Symphony*, introduced me to his world."

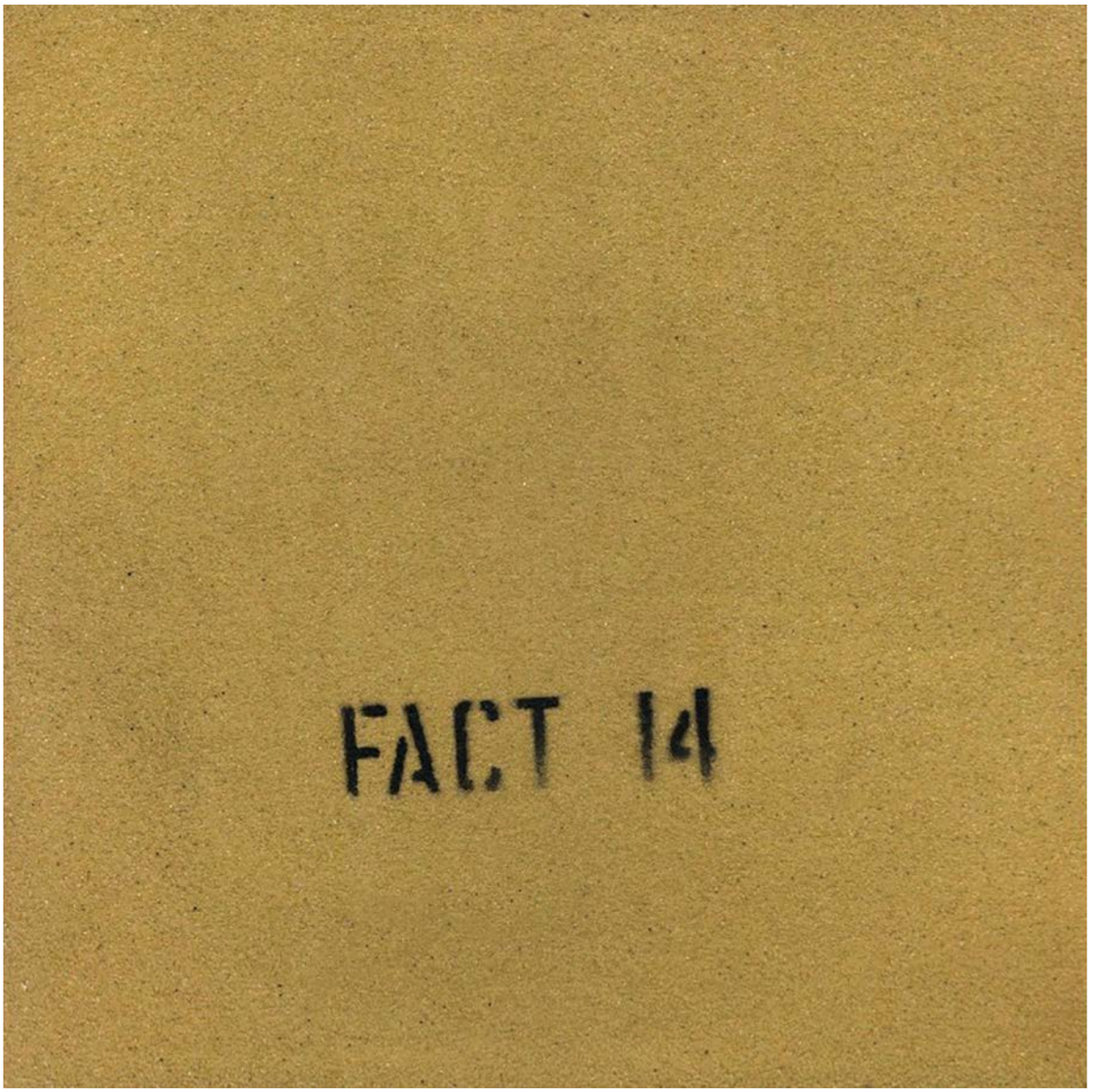
CZECH PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
MARTINU

"People know I like a nice dischord: the one opening *Mémorial To Lidice* is so arresting and sets the tone. The *4th Symphony* is perhaps his best; beautiful, unusual harmony and great rhythmic sections."

OTIS REDDING
OTIS BLUE

"At school, Peter Gabriel and I used to play a great variety of music that included *A Change Is Gonna Come* and *I've Been Loving You Too Long*: soulful singing of a not-quite-straightforward song, with an interesting arrangement." ●

The Story Behind The Sleeve



#13 The Return Of The Durutti Column

The Durutti Column

A situationist statement designed to destroy the other records around it, The Durutti Column's 1980 debut album was released in four initial runs totalling 3,600 copies. Its sleeve had two sheets of sandpaper adhered to it, with some copies sprayed with 'FACT 14'. Under Tony Wilson's command, Joy Division and A Certain Ratio assembled at Alan Erasmus' flat in Manchester. They were reportedly paid £15 each and given a pile of 4,000 sheets of sandpaper, with Ian Curtis taking on the bulk of the work while his bandmates watched a porn film in another room. Despite Curtis's efforts, Factory creative director Peter Saville was underwhelmed: "To me, it looked like a DIY thing that was, really, the antithesis of what I was trying to do. It looked a bit homemade." When reissued by Factory Benelux in 2014, with label curator James Nice struggling to source the right sandpaper, the design instead incorporated a die-cut of the Factory logo and a polythene bag, gaining Saville and the band's approval.

Now Spinning

The 13 tracks on the *Long Live Vinyl* turntable this month to be enjoyed with our companion beer – Duvel Tripel Hop Citra.

1 ***The Shepherd Dogs Are Calling*** – A Hawk And A Hacksaw (Living Music Duplication)
2 *Slow Motion Life* – **Gaz Coombes (Hot Fruit/Caroline)**
3 ***Nameless, Faceless*** – Courtney Barnett (Marathon Artists)
4 *77 Million Paintings* – **Brian Eno (Universal)**
5 ***So What*** – Miles Davis & John Coltrane (Sony Legacy)
6 *Just Dumb Enough To Try* – **Father John Misty (Bella Union)**
7 ***Stagger Lee*** – Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds (Mute)
8 *I Must Be Mad* – **Craig (Fontana)**
9 ***Free To Run*** – Gomez (UMC)
10 *Spanish Sahara* – **Foals (Transgressive)**
11 ***Last Ride*** – Beach House (Bella Union)
12 *Four Out Of Five* – **Arctic Monkeys (Domino)**
13 ***Old Man*** – Love (Rhino)

New Indulgence

Producer/engineers Chris Kimsey, Gary Langan and Liam Nolan are among the guests at The Festival Of Sound, a three-day event kicking off on 28 September at London's Hammersmith International Centre. Headphones and hi-fi will be in abundance and we're promised the global premiere of some of the world's most expensive audio products. The show was previously known as the Indulgence Show, but has moved "further into the realms of music in all its guises," organiser Vernon Hamblin tells us, "from vinyl fairs and musical instruments, to live performances." See indulgenceshow.com for info.

THE DARK WEB
The Dark Side Of The Moon **held on at No. 1 in Discogs' chart of February's best-selling records. There were some surprise entrants, however – check out the full line-up by visiting www.longlivevinyl.net.**

HD VINYL DRAWS NEAR
Austrian start-up Rebeat Innovation has received $4.8 million in funding to get the idea of 'HD Vinyl' off the ground. According to Rebeat CEO Günter Loibl: "By summer 2019, we shall see the first releases in the stores."

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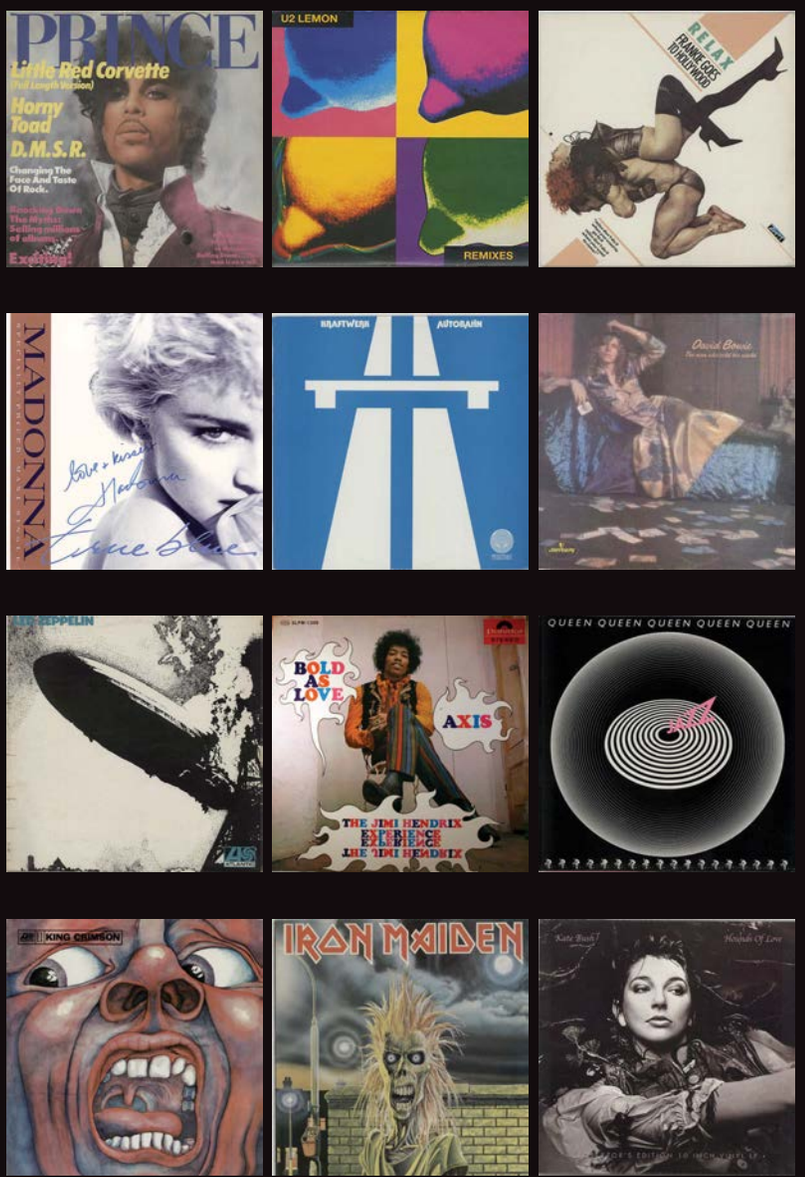

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Cure Mix It Up

The Cure revisit one of their curveballs – *Mixed Up* – on 15 June. The project dates back to 1990, when the group had reached their most successful period with *Disintegration*, only to realise the entire sonic landscape had changed. Undeterred, Robert Smith set about remixing the group's back catalogue for the impending dance age.

Mixed Up is now set to be reissued on vinyl, accompanied by *Torn Down (Mixed Up Extras)*, a follow-up compilation of 16 new mixes, which have been created across the last 12 months and are presented in chronological release order.

FROM A TO ZZ

After last year's vinyl collection that gathered their first five LPs, ZZ Top are back with a sequel. *Cinco No. 2* carries the five albums that spanned the 80s and made the trio unlikely global superstars. After the 70s-era boogie of *Degüello*, the set moves onto the power-pop years of 1981's *El Loco*, 1983's Diamond-certified *Eliminator*, 1985's *Afterburner* and 1990's *Recycler*.

Email news and press releases to
ian.peel@anthem-publishing.com

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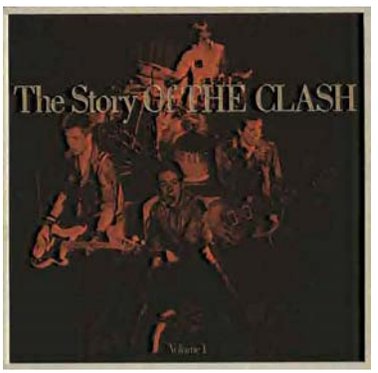


THE CLASH

THE STORY OF THE CLASH, VOLUME 1

1988 UK 28-track double-vinyl album complete with illustrated narrative inners and single-pocket picture sleeve.

£50

SUPERGRASS

I SHOULD COCO

Rare 1995 UK Parlophone label 13-track vinyl LP complete with the Bonus 7" featuring a version of the Jimi Hendrix Experience classic *Stone Free* and *Odd?* Must have the original stickered picture sleeve and artwork inner to fetch top whack.

£85

THE MOTHERS OF INVENTION

FREAK OUT!

Very rare 1967 UK 11-track stereo single LP on the black Verve label, in a front-laminated flipback picture-sleeve. Only released as a single album in the UK, France, Italy and Germany, and the most difficult to source of all the Zappa UK releases.

£250

THE PINK FLOYD

SEE EMILY PLAY

Rare 1967 UK 7" vinyl single also featuring *Scarecrow*, with intact four-prong push-out centre, Columbia company die-cut paper sleeve.

£175

On The Radar

GENGAHR

Londoners discover their wild side at second attempt for sophomore album

Sometimes you have to destroy to rebuild. So it was for Hackney natives Gengahr, who spent two years conceiving and recording the follow-up to outstanding debut *A Dream Outside*, before scrapping the tapes and starting again from scratch. It was a bold move, with momentum fading and their label, Transgressive, eagerly awaiting a second album. The key to the urgent shimmering vibrancy of *Where Wildness Grows* proved to be in drawing upon their incendiary live sound.

"We came at it from a fresher and more live approach, and, if anything, tried to be less clever," says singer Felix Bushe of an album that flits between sunny indie-pop hooks and widescreen guitar soundscapes. "We took away a lot of the synths and programmed bits and replaced them with more live, honest playing. We'd spent two years playing live, and it felt crazy not to use that touring experience. It's been a bit of a journey of self-discovery, and opened the door into seeing what we're capable of. The last thing we want to be is just another indie-guitar band – that doesn't sound like a particularly exciting prospect.

"The calling happened when we'd been in there three months. Realistically, things have to happen relatively quickly to be right, as a sort of gut feeling. We were trying to fix things in the mix and you realise by that point, you're unravelling so much, it's easier just to start again entirely."

That new start saw the introduction of producer Neil Comber, who added fresh impetus. "We'd been working with various people and it wasn't quite happening," says Felix. "Neil had just finished working on the Songhoy Blues album, and the guys at Transgressive said we should meet him. He's a real character, with a huge amount of energy. He'd be there dancing in the control booth and making us feel super-positive. He breathes a certain energy into the project, which is invaluable."

A band who've played together since they were 11 years old, Gengahr's thirst for innovation extended to the vinyl version of *Where Wildness Grows*, a limited number of which came with a free pack of seeds adhered to the cover.

"We were joking about it, and I didn't think we were going to do it. I wanted the artwork to be a series of shots linked with nature, so it felt like a body of work. It seemed a funny idea, and we can also offset some of the un-eco-friendly aspect of making records. That was the idea behind it – growing things and making the world a bit greener…

"I listened to the test pressing. It was very satisfying – everything always sounds better on vinyl. We've always kept things DIY, the vast majority of the output is done by us. We're responsible not just for the creative output, but a lot of the graft that goes on around it; that's all part of the fun and the creativity." ● ***Gary Walker***

IAN PEEL'S LINER NOTES

It happens to us all at some point, unfortunately. And now it's happened to me – I'm having to delve deep into my vinyl archive and start having a clear-out…

I've simply run out of space at home and can't move for all the records… But there is an unexpected upside to the oft-avoided task of slimming down my vinyl collection: I'm finding records I'd completely forgotten I owned. And, although this doesn't get the job done, exactly, I'm rediscovering old purchases and falling in love with them all over again.

The first such rediscovery? A 5" single of Jona Lewie's *Big Shot – Momentarily*. I have no idea where or when I got this. And, looking at it again all these years later, I can't believe an artist or a label was mad enough to have pressed a 5" rather than 7" single. It can't even play on an automatic turntable. But having worked with Jona on many an occasion, it makes perfect (non)sense and fits the One Hit Wonder narrative after the spring of 1980's *You'll Always Find Me In The Kitchen At Parties*. He knew he couldn't record anything as big ever again – quite literally a big shot, momentarily – though everyone was to be proved wrong that Christmas…

Another record that I'm now refusing to part with is equally as odd: *New Dimension (Electro Mix)* by Imagination on 'Giant Single'. It really does look like a giant single, too. A 12" with enormous 6" paper labels, the A-side of which shows the trio in full *Scandalous*-era attire through the die-cut sleeve.

It's led me to obsess about Giant Singles for the past month. Anyone I've mentioned them to has immediately cited perhaps the biggest seller of the format, a particular edition of Pet Shop Boys' *West End Girls*. So I went looking for it on Discogs, but found it completely buried away.

Scan down the list of every 12" version of *West End Girls* and you'll see the '12", Maxi' from Europe, and '12", Maxi, EP' from the Philippines… and then I spotted it: '12", Ove' from the UK – the 'Ove' being explained in the full format listing: 'Vinyl, 12", Oversize Label, Die-Cut Sleeve'.

"Every week, Parlophone were putting out a new format to give West End Girls an extra shove up the charts. So it went through a load of different formats…"

But why on earth did these things exist? In our sister magazine *Classic Pop*'s new *Pet Shop Boys Special Edition*, Neil Tennant alludes to one answer: "In those days, there weren't so many rules about formats," he says, "which was great. And so Parlophone did a really good job: every week they were putting out a new format to give it an extra shove up the charts. So *West End Girls* went through a load of different formats…"

I have an idea of my own as to why this obscure format was invented. I've since found a David Bowie & Bing Crosby 12" from 1982 with just two short tracks on each side. And, when you look at the grooves on the *Imagination* 12", you can see there's very little music on it (Side 2's second track is a one-minute *a cappella*). So maybe some bright spark thought that, rather than have it look like an empty record, they could increase the diameter of the label to balance things up? ●

[PIAS] ACTION PRESTON • BADLANDS CHELTENHAM • BANQUET KINGSTON • BEATDOWN NEWCASTLE • BLACK CIRCLE LEIGHTON BUZZARD • BLACKEST RAINBOW SHEFFIELD • CASBAH GREENWICH • CODA PHONICA LONDON • POLAR BEAR BIRMINGHAM • PROBE LIVERPOOL • RAPTURE WITNEY • RAVES FROM THE GRAVE FROME • RECORD CORNER GODALMING • REFLEX NEWCASTLE • RELEVANT CAMBRIDGE • RESIDENT BRIGHTON • ROLLERCOASTER KILKENNY • ROUGH TRADE BRISTOL • ROUGH TRADE LONDON • ROUGH TRADE NOTTINGHAM • SEISMIC LEAMINGTON SPA • SISTER RAY LONDON • SLIDE BEDFORD • SOUNDCLASH NORWICH • SOUND IT OUT STOCKTON ON TEES • SOUND KNOWLEDGE MALBOROUGH • SOUNDS OF THE UNIVERSE LONDON • SOUTH SOUTHEND • SPILLERS CARDIFF • SPINDIZZY DUBLIN • SWORDFISH BIRMINGHAM • TALLBIRD CHELTENHAM • TOTTINGHAM • FREEBIRD DUBLIN • FRIENDLY BRISTOL • GATEFIELD SOUNDS WHITSTABLE • HONEST JONS LONDON • HOT SALVATION FOLKESTONE • JAM FALMOUTH • JUMBO LEEDS • LEFT FOR DEAD SHREWSBURY • LOST IN VINYL CAMBRIDGE • MOLD RECORD SHOP MOLD •MONORAIL GLASGOW • MUSIC NOT DEAD BEXHILL ON SEA • NIGHTFLY RECORDS UXBRIDGE • NORMANS LEEDS • PEBBLE EASTBOURNE • PICCADILLY MANCHESTER • PIE & VINYL SOUTHSEA ESTERFILED • TOWER DUBLIN • TRANSMISSION MARGATE • TRUCK STORE OXFORD • UNDERGROUND SOLUTION EDINBURGH • VENUS VINYL LONDON • VINYL COLLECTORS SALISBURY • VINYL HUNTER BURY ST EDMUNDS • WAH WAH RECORDS WAKEFIELD MUSIC EDINBURGH • COOL DISC DERRY • CRASH LEEDS • DAVID'S LETCHWORTH • DIVERSE MUSIC NEWPORT • DRIFT TOTNES • EARWORM YORK • ECLIPSE WALSALL • ELEPHANT WINCHESTER • EMPIRE ST ALBANS • FIVES LEIGH ON SEA • FOREVER RECORDS N

LIZ PHAIR
GIRLY SOUND TO GUYVILLE
THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY BOX SET
Matador Records

STEPHEN MALKMUS
SPARKLE HARD
Domino Records

FATHER JOHN MISTY
GOD'S FAVORITE CUSTOMER
Bella Union

JON HOPKINS
SINGULARITY
Domino Records

BREEDERS
LAST SPLASH
4AD

CORDUROY
RETURN OF THE FABRIC FOUR
Acid Jazz

BEACH HOUSE
7
Bella Union

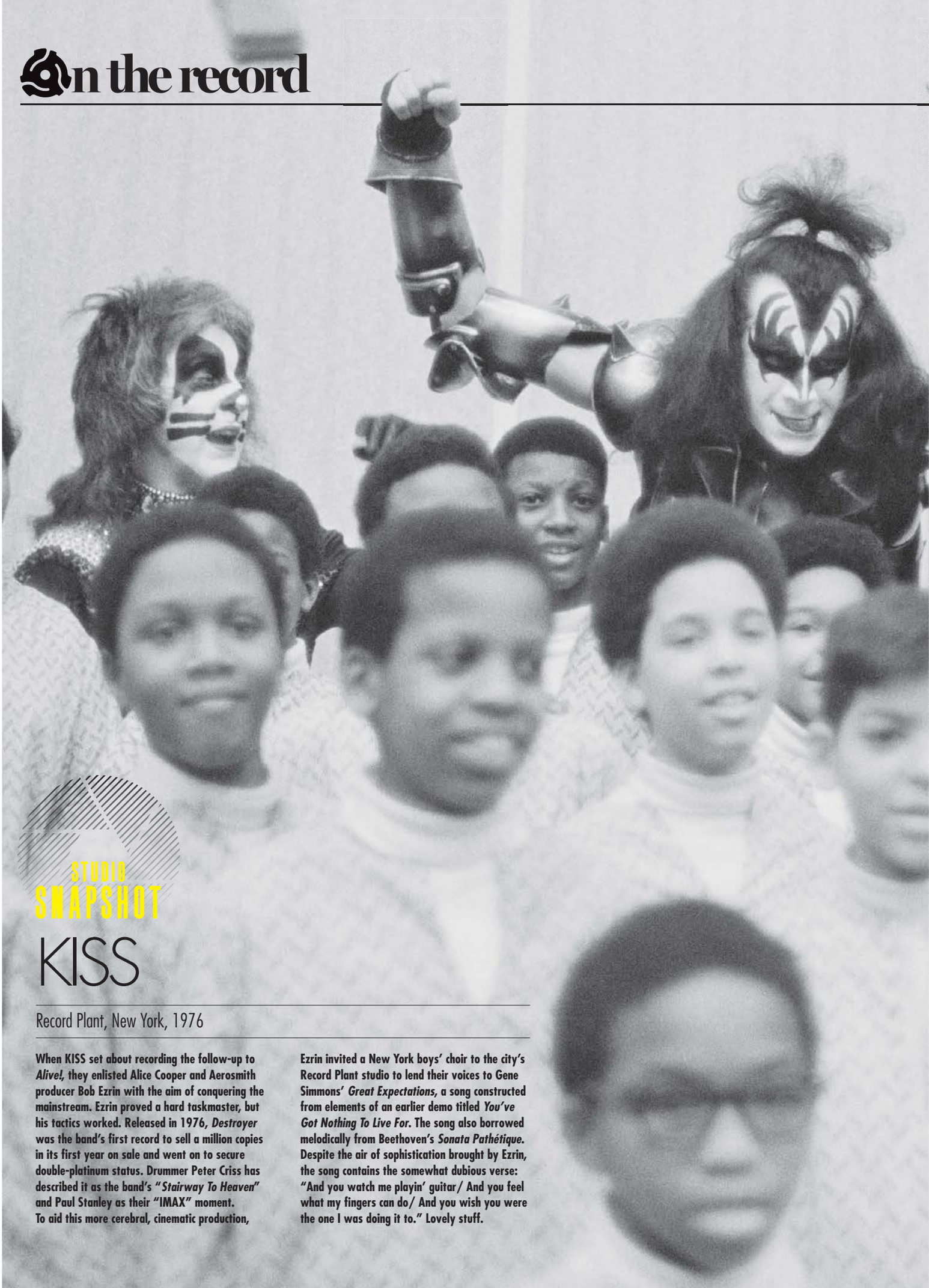
BREEDERS
POD
4AD

THE BEAT ESCAPE
LIFE IS SHORT THE ANSWER'S LONG
Bella Union

SIMIAN MOBILE DISCO
MURMURATIONS
Wichita Recordings

OKKERVIL RIVER
IN THE RAINBOW RAIN
ATO

DANIEL BLUMBERG
MINUS
Mute



STUDIO SNAPSHOT

KISS

Record Plant, New York, 1976

When KISS set about recording the follow-up to *Alive!*, they enlisted Alice Cooper and Aerosmith producer Bob Ezrin with the aim of conquering the mainstream. Ezrin proved a hard taskmaster, but his tactics worked. Released in 1976, *Destroyer* was the band's first record to sell a million copies in its first year on sale and went on to secure double-platinum status. Drummer Peter Criss has described it as the band's "*Stairway To Heaven*" and Paul Stanley as their "IMAX" moment.
To aid this more cerebral, cinematic production, Ezrin invited a New York boys' choir to the city's Record Plant studio to lend their voices to Gene Simmons' *Great Expectations*, a song constructed from elements of an earlier demo titled *You've Got Nothing To Live For*. The song also borrowed melodically from Beethoven's *Sonata Pathétique*. Despite the air of sophistication brought by Ezrin, the song contains the somewhat dubious verse: "And you watch me playin' guitar/ And you feel what my fingers can do/ And you wish you were the one I was doing it to." Lovely stuff.

WHY I LOVE...

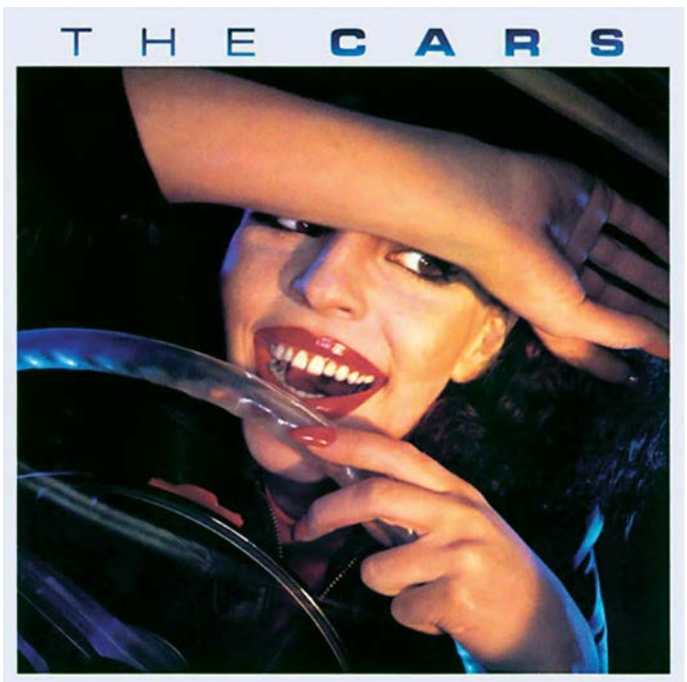
The Cars
The Cars

BILLY HOWERDEL

The co-founder of hard-rock supergroup A Perfect Circle tells *Why Vinyl Matters* author **Jennifer Otter Bickerdike** about his early experiences buying vinyl, and recalls his very first time…

"I have four older sisters, so my first music came from whatever they were listening to. My oldest sister was into the Stones and Beatles, standard things. The second oldest, she was more into pop on the radio – REO Speedwagon and Styx. Lisa, my third oldest, she was into harder rock. She gave me AC/DC's *Back In Black*. I remember being 10 years old when that came out. Lisa had hyped it so much. It was such a shock to hear something that heavy and complete all at once; it was such an incredible record.

"The music I got into at a young age was mostly from Lisa and the older brother of my friend Tommy – both boys lived next door to us. The whole post-punk British scene came to me from the brother. He was into all of the interesting stuff; I really owe a lot to him, because it really put me down the path of interesting artists. I still talk to the brother. He brought all of his family to one of my concerts. They live in a little town. Coming to a big rock show, getting backstage – it was a big deal for them. I told his kids: 'Your father was one of the biggest influences – musically – on me.' They were like: 'What?!? He only listens to talk radio, he doesn't even listen to music!'. Tommy was the cool guy that listened to cool music. It's funny, as you get older, tastes and interests change. I got into Elvis Costello, Blue Öyster Cult and all of those things from him. The first Elvis Costello records, I know every lyric and melody and nuance until *Goodbye Cruel World* [Costello's ninth album, released in 1984]. His first record [1977's *My Aim Is True*] – I was so deep into it. Listening to him and looking at the covers, it was like church for me."



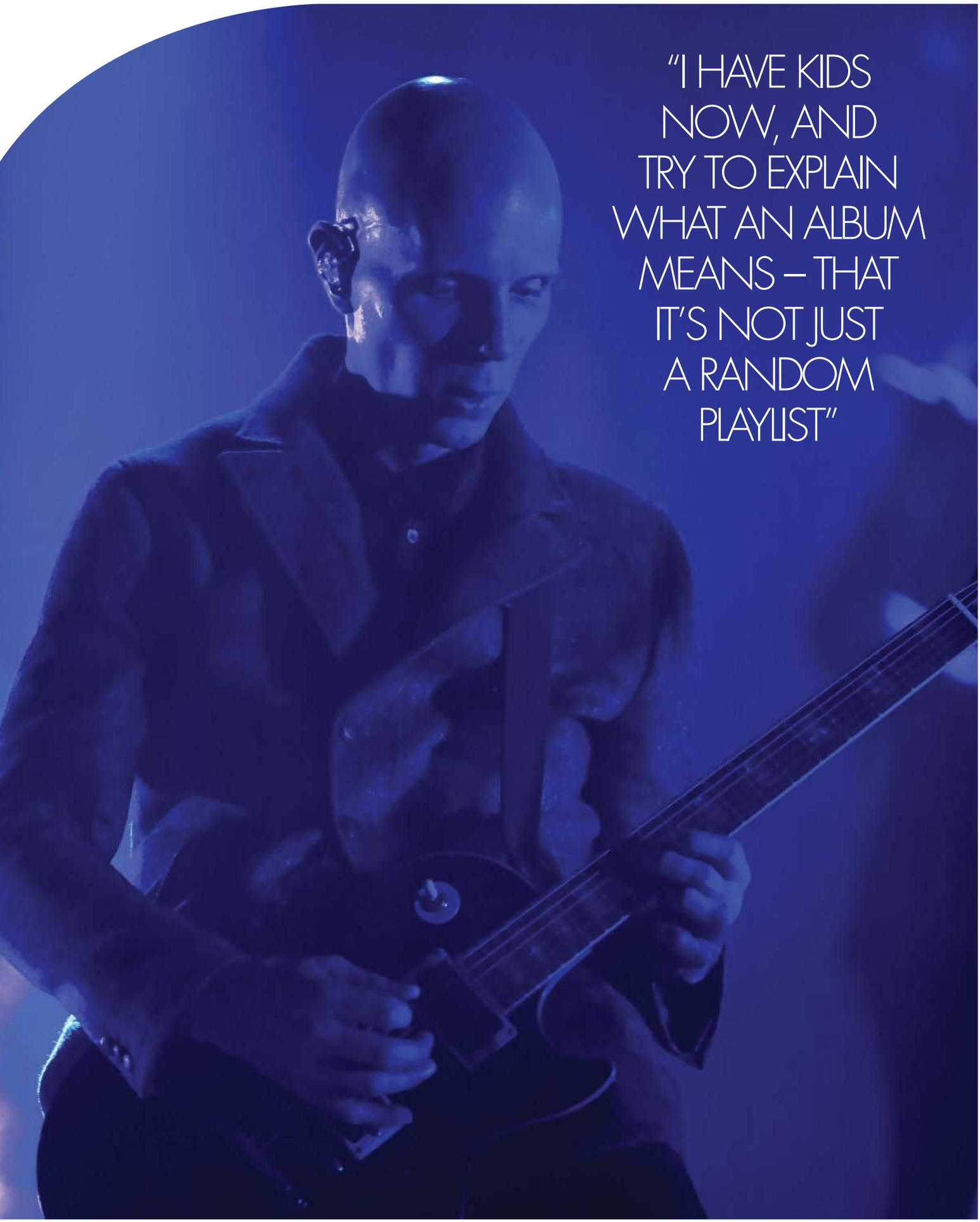
ISLAND RECORDS

"Around this same time, I discovered a radio station in Long Island that my mom's clock radio picked up. I would just listen to that, write things down that I had never heard of, and go to the local music store called Sound Exchange in New Jersey and ask the clerks behind the counter if they had those records. They would curate their own list and I would go through stuff in there. It was amazing.

"That was where I bought my first record with my own money; money I had earnt from chores. It was the debut album by The Cars. We already had it on 8-track, but the vinyl was an upgrade. I literally remember walking down the aisle, I think it was $10. I have kids now, and try to explain what an album means – that it's not just a random playlist, not just some random set of songs that someone thinks is interesting.

"For me, the album is such an important format. There's something about sitting down with a collection of songs. Something front-to-back is so different to: 'Oh, what's that band with that song? What's the band again?'" ●

A Perfect Circle, helmed by Billy Howerdel and Maynard James Keenan, released their fourth album, Eat The Elephant, on 20 April via BMG. For more info, see www.aperfectcircle.com



"I HAVE KIDS NOW, AND TRY TO EXPLAIN WHAT AN ALBUM MEANS – THAT IT'S NOT JUST A RANDOM PLAYLIST"

SUPER MAN

Gaz Coombes releases his third solo album, *World's Strongest Man,* this month – the follow-up to 2015's excellent, Mercury Prize-nominated *Matador.* **Will Simpson** finds out more about his revitalised creative process, studio freedom and the vital role vinyl has always played in his life…

The longer you spend in a band, the trickier it is to establish yourself as a solo entity – just think of Mick Jagger's repeated attempts to carve a niche away from the Stones. Gaz Coombes spent 17 years as the frontman and face of Supergrass, and still has to be précised by references to his former group… Though perhaps for not much longer.

His second solo album, 2015's *Matador*, was a critical and commercial hit, winning plaudits and a Mercury nomination. The follow-up, *World's Strongest Man*, is even better: a confident-sounding, beguiling album brimming with musical invention and midlife yearning that you just know will feature heavily on those year-end lists. By then, he might not be 'Gaz Coombes: he used to be in Supergrass' – just Gaz Coombes.

"Well, that's up to other people whether they still see me in that way," he smiles, clutching his pint, sat in a quiet nook of a West London pub. "But yeah, it's been really exciting these past four or five years. It's probably been the most creative time of my life, as far as musical output and writing is concerned. I feel really good about things."

The umbilical cord with the parent group was finally cut back in 2010. There was no personal animosity, he says; it's just they'd got bogged down recording their seventh album. "It was like pulling teeth, trying to get us to agree on what we liked and didn't like and how we should approach it. I remember going back home between sessions and it was really getting me down. I knew it wasn't working, but I also knew I couldn't really see a way out of it, because there were some stubborn feelings around. I thought, 'I can't do this, 'cos it's not making me feel good. I've just got to step away'. And that felt good – being honest with everyone and finally saying, 'I don't want to do this anymore'." At that stage, Coombes had no plans to go solo. "I didn't leave Supergrass to go solo; I did it to fix my head," he insists – but after a while, he started writing songs anyway. "It's what I do: I play and I write. It was inevitable that six months later, I'd start again." He describes 2012's *Here Come The Bombs* as "an almost accidental first album".

MUSIC IN THE BLOOD

Coombes has known no other life than music. He was still a teen when the first Supergrass album was released and his previous band, The Jennifers, had been signed to Nude Records when Gaz was just 16. His dad played jazz piano and his brothers have both played professionally – big bro Rob was involved in Supergrass and his younger sibling Charly played keys in blues-rock band the 22-20s. Then there was his uncle's secret stash of vinyl. "When I was about 10 or 11, my uncle went travelling

THREE GAZ COOMBES RARITIES

THE JENNIFERS
Just Got Back Today
(Nude)
The only official release by Coombes' first band is a 12" that attracts prices of up to £50 on Discogs.

SUPERGRASS
Caught By The Fuzz
(Parlophone)
Their debut single – the 7" sold out quickly on release in 1994.

THE HOTRATS
Damaged Goods/ Fight For Your Right
(Not On Label)
Gaz and Danny Goffey's tongue-in-cheek covers band. This double-A-side single from 2010 pairs the Beastie Boys anthem with their version of the Gang Of Four single.

and he left his record collection in the basement of my family house – boxes and boxes, lined up. I remember my parents saying, 'don't go near Uncle Pete's records'. So, of course, I'd creep down there at night, flick through the covers, read the sleeve notes on the back and I discovered, well, everything: Patti Smith, Blondie, Zappa, Sex Pistols, you name it. Then I started taking them up to my room and playing them on my Alba Midi system, with a needle like a piece of glass, probably killing the vinyl."

It was a household in which music was heard constantly. "There was also this stuff coming through my bedroom walls. My older brother was listening to a lot of Spacemen 3, Chapterhouse, The Cure – The Cure were probably the first band of that era I really got into as a kid. And The Smiths! I remember picking up a lot of their singles. They were really wonderful things to have – the sleeves were fantastic. I've still got them all now, all lined up. I've also got a 10" of *Meat Is Murder* that I think is quite rare.

"Vinyl played a really central role in how I got into music and even now, I still collect it. Most places we go to on tour, I go into a record shop. I lived in Brighton for 10 years and there'd be record fairs down at the Conference Centre, and I remember picking up an original copy of *On The Beach* by Neil Young. And *Pacific Ocean Blue* by Dennis Wilson. This was before there had been any reissues of either, so it really was like finding buried treasure. Then I found *The Man Who Sold The World* – the American issue with the cartoon cover, the cowboy one. It was really exciting finding these weird, alternative versions of classic albums."

MELLOW GRASS

When The Jennifers ended, Gaz and school friend Danny Goffey formed Supergrass with bassist Mick Quinn. Looking back now, they seem to have ended up curiously undervalued as a band. Though they had a No. 1 album and 14 Top 40 singles – including one, *Alright*, which to this day remains a generational anthem for the sun-kissed children of the mid 90s – they never seem to crop up on all of those Britpop documentaries and retrospectives. Even non-fans regarded them with a certain affection, but perhaps a lack of drama or narrative in their career meant they were taken for granted.

Masculinity and mental health issues are among the lyrical themes on Coombes' new album

Gaz Coombes onstage in 1999, a busy year when Supergrass were festival regulars, released their third album and toured throughout Europe

"Yeah, it's a weird one," he considers. "I think the quality of what we did was a lot stronger than a lot of the other stuff that was going on – it had a rawness and realness to it. But we didn't have the swagger and arrogance of those other bands; all that larger-than-life kind of thing. We didn't all move to London, get involved in the scene and go down that route. We wanted to be in our bubble as a band and not play the fame game. We were subtle, in a way, but subtlety doesn't get you to the top.

"I think even at our peak, we were always a band who would do it our own way. We had so many offers – some ridiculous, others really serious. There was that Spielberg thing, for instance [bowled over by the *Alright* video, the iconic director approached them about making a Monkees-style TV series]. That was a serious thing and we just turned it down flat! At the time, it was more important to get our second album out."

But even if Supergrass could have been bigger, their ex-frontman seems on a roll at present. Maybe he's one of those artists who just peak later? "Well, for me, there's no reason why, 25 years later, I can't capture something on record that's as good if not better than those early Supergrass records," he insists. "Energy-wise, it doesn't mean you have to settle into being a 'mellow' songwriter, or a 'singer-songwriter'. I've always hated that term. It gives me the wrong image. I don't see myself as one."

However he styles himself, he's revelling in the creative freedom solo life affords, playing most of the instruments on *World's Strongest Man* himself. "I like to come up

"WE'D ALWAYS DO IT OUR OWN WAY. WE HAD SO MANY OFFERS – SOME WERE RIDICULOUS, OTHERS REALLY SERIOUS"

Coombes played many of the instruments on his new solo album himself, from within "imaginary line-ups"

"IT MIGHT WORK, IT MIGHT NOT. IT'S A REALLY EXCITING WAY TO CREATE: THROWING MAD IDEAS AROUND"

with an imaginary line-up before I start – 'Oh, we'll start with a guitar and piano', or: 'I'm going to record this with drums, bass synthesiser and violin'. It might work, it might not. It's a really exciting way to create: throwing mad ideas around without feeling like you've got someone else twiddling their thumbs on the sidelines. It's harder in a band. You need to keep the energy flowing and people get bored."

A music-saturated household has remained a constant. "I've got a pair of decks in the studio, but there's also a record player in the kitchen. There's a little box down there that I keep on siphoning records into, from the studio into the kitchen.

"I'm always looking for new stuff to play on vinyl. We had a New Year's party a few months back, so I thought I'd get hold of a few party-type records. I bought the Goat album on vinyl, The Lemon Twigs' record and this ESG boxset, which is brilliant."

The big question, though, is whether he's passed on his passion to the next generation – are his own daughters as obsessed by records as Coombes and his siblings once were? "It's hard, isn't it?" he says. "They kind of are. I think vinyl is fascinating to them. My kids, when they first looked at it, were all, 'Oh wow, that's incredible, what is he doing to them? That's amazing! What, the sounds come out of that?'

"And then they go onto YouTube and consume everything on screen. But I'm a big believer in leading by example. Maybe, at some point, it'll have an impact…" ●

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AVID turntables uniquely connect the record to the spindle removing these unwanted bad vibrations, lowering the background noise to the inky black level of this advert, so you simply hear music not noise.

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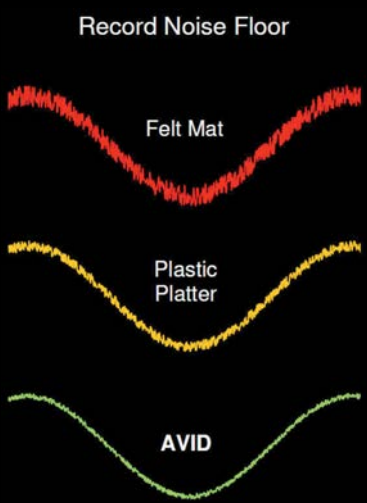

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RATIONAL ANTHEMS

Parquet Courts' joint frontman A. Savage tells **Jonathan Wright** about the American rockers' new LP and its "anthems against nihilism"…

There were, says A. Savage, two primary emotions he wanted to explore when it came time to record the new Parquet Courts album, *Wide Awake!*: "Joy and anger". These are not emotions you readily associate together, but perhaps it helps here if, like Savage, you're steeped in the American punk scene. "Take a band like Youth Of Today," he says, namechecking a straight-edge Connecticut hardcore band first active in the 1980s. "All the lyrics were about not drinking and being positive, but the music was angry: it was all still angry boys screaming into a mic, but being positive. I think that aggression needs to be there."

It's an observation rooted in disquiet over the current political situation, especially in the USA, but the reason Savage emphasises joy as well as anger is because it's self-defeating to counter those who espouse populism on their own terms. "All these leaders – Trump, Putin – they're nihilists, they don't believe in anything," says Savage. "Nihilism, it's not like a thing where you can fight fire with fire, you need to believe in something right now. And so that was the overarching theme for me: anthems against nihilism."

It's a succinct description of *Wide Awake!*, a state-of-the-world record that deals with big themes, such as the first rush of political consciousness on the title track, "collectivism versus autonomy and about how mutually exclusive they need to be" on *Total Football*, and global warming on the sardonic *Before The Water Gets Too High*.

But if *Wide Awake!* nods back to punk conceptually, that's by no means the full story. Sonically, it's an album that's far more expansive than anything Parquet Courts have recorded before, incorporating funk influences and electronica. It also marks the first time the band have worked with an A-list producer, in Danger Mouse, aka Brian Burton (Gnarls Barkley, Broken Bells, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Adele, many more).

Perhaps surprisingly, Savage says this didn't have much effect on the way Parquet Courts approached recording at Sonic Ranch, 'the world's biggest' residential studio, in Texas. "Process-wise, not much changed," he says. Then again, one reason the band wanted to work with Danger Mouse is because he's not a producer with a style so distinctive that it becomes more important to the record than the artists he works with.

"He was somebody who genuinely wanted the band to sound like *the band*," says Savage. "I honestly wasn't familiar with him at first and when I listened to what he had done, there didn't seem to be a sound, which is good and encouraging, because what it means is he respects the artist and wants them to sound like themselves, not to enforce his will and his mark on something. There are different kinds of producers, but I think we knew we definitely wanted to work with one who was going to recognise and be a fan of what we do, and want to push us and encourage us rather than put his own stamp on something we'd already been establishing for the past eight years."

For all this, there's a snap, a commercial savvy about *Wide Awake!* that is, if not wholly new, far more finely honed than on ▶

VINYL LIFE

A. Savage's favourite record stores in NYC and beyond…

A. Savage has 3,000 albums. "I'm starting to entertain the idea of moving into my own apartment," he says, reflecting on his shared accommodation. "I've put that off for four years, probably just because of the moving records bit of it. Soon, whether I do that or not, I'll have to have a frank discussion with myself about how important these things are I've amassed."

Savage's not too interested in "the cult of vinyl". Nevertheless, it's still his favourite format: "The music interests me, but as an artist, someone visual, someone who gets really into designing the packaging of Parquet Courts records, it's the best physical format I've found so far."

He doesn't go record shopping on tour as often as he used to do because: "I guess I'm more interested in buying food now", but he's still able to rattle off a list of favourite record stores.

"Probably one of the best stores selling new punk and hardcore stuff is called Material World (shop.materialworldrecords.com) and it's in Brooklyn. It's great. Academy Records (www.academy-lps.com) in Brooklyn is wonderful for all types of music. The Academy on West 18th Street (www.academy-records.com) is great for jazz, new music, avant kind of stuff. There's a store called Record Grouch (recordgrouch.com) in Greenpoint, Brooklyn that's wonderful. I don't even walk down that block unless I know I have money in my pocket, I know I'll go in there. And the Captured Tracks store (www.omnianmusicgroup.com/pages/our-brooklyn-shop) is really good. I guess when I'm on tour, there are places I always like to go: End Of An Ear (www.endofanear.com, in Austin, Texas) or Double Decker in Pennsylvania (www.doubledeckerrecords.com) – those two might be the best record stores I've ever been to."

Any final thoughts on vinyl? "I would encourage your readers to take the sleeves outside of the jacket and file them away that way. It was a long afternoon, but an afternoon well spent, I'd say."

previous Parquet Courts records. It could well be an album that pushes the band towards the kind of unlikely mainstream success enjoyed by, say, The Decemberists. Bearing this in mind, did Savage feel any pressure around expectations of the record?

"No, not really, no," he laughs. "I probably have only thought that once, and that was for *Sunbathing Animal* [2014], because it was the first time we had come into the studio with an actual audience that was listening to us, which wasn't the case on *Light Up Gold* [2012] or certainly not the first record. But no, expectations are only going to get in the way."

If Savage seems taken aback by the question, it perhaps helps to understand that *Long Live Vinyl* meets him at The Louisiana in Bristol, a waterside pub with a modest-sized upstairs room for gigs. Later on the same day, he will perform a show to promote his 2017 solo album, *Thawing Dawn*, released via his own Dull Tools label, a collection of songs that's quieter and more intimate than his work with Parquet Courts.

DIY ETHOS

Savage doesn't begrudge going back to smaller venues. Rather, he relishes it. "There was a time that playing places like this would have been beyond my imagination, so going back to playing rooms for 200 people or 150 people, I really do miss it," he says. The solo work, he adds, is a way "to express myself differently", because: "I'm not just a musician in Parquet". Besides: "I don't really go to shows resembling the ones Parquet Courts play in civilian life, the ones I go to would be more similar to this in New York."

You could, of course, see this as posturing. It's the kind of thing musicians routinely say to prove they're of the people, yet it's a remark in keeping with Parquet Courts' history. The first LP from the band (Savage, brother Max on drums, co-frontman Austin

Parquet Courts (l to r): Sean Yeaton, Max Savage, Austin Brown and A. Savage

Brown and bassist Sean Yeaton), *American Specialities* in 2011, was initially a cassette-only release. For all Parquet Courts seemed to break through suddenly in the UK, the reality is the band gradually built an audience through graft. To use a word not much associated with the music business, there's a *rigour* to Parquet Courts, a quality that mirrors hardcore's emphasis on self-reliance and honesty – ahem, keeping it real, even.

Savage doesn't disagree. Parquet Courts, he says, are rooted in punk, but he's realistic about where the band may be headed, if suspicious about the genre labels – indie, alternative – that come along with finding a bigger audience. "I think we're more of a rock band now," he says. "We come out of punk, that's the reason I do a DIY label with smaller bands, I never want to leave that world. But Parquet Courts kind of has and that's fine, I no longer have existential dread surrounding that. I'm at peace with that, because I'm still active in the scene in New York with my label, the venues that I go to, the bands that I support, my friends all are there… but Parquet Courts doesn't play those shows in New York anymore."

"THERE WAS A TIME THAT PLAYING PLACES LIKE THIS WOULD'VE BEEN BEYOND MY IMAGINATION, SO GOING BACK TO PLAYING ROOMS FOR 150 OR 200 PEOPLE, I REALLY DO MISS IT"

Even when the Brooklyn residents did play a hometown show in 2017, it was at Silent Barn, a community arts space. "We always like to play weird and odd spots, even if they're very large odd spots, and something to always kind of keep us at a distance from the standard trajectory of what a band like us should be doing," says Savage. "One thing that distinguishes Parquet Courts is, too many people take these kind of placeholder milestones as gospel stages of ascension, whereas part of being in Parquet Courts is this idea that we have agency and we can choose our own way."

DIVINE INSPIRATION

In this context, it's perhaps telling that, at one point, Savage notes: "I like bands that stand out, that are outliers to an outlier scene." Or even outlier records by outliers. A big influence on the young Savage was *Yes Sir, I Will* by Crass, the 1983 album where the anarcho-punks improvise and offer up "one long manifesto over the course of two sides that goes from raw noise to soft parts". As a fan of "capital 'p' punk", here was a record that went against the teenage Savage's preconceptions of what punk should be.

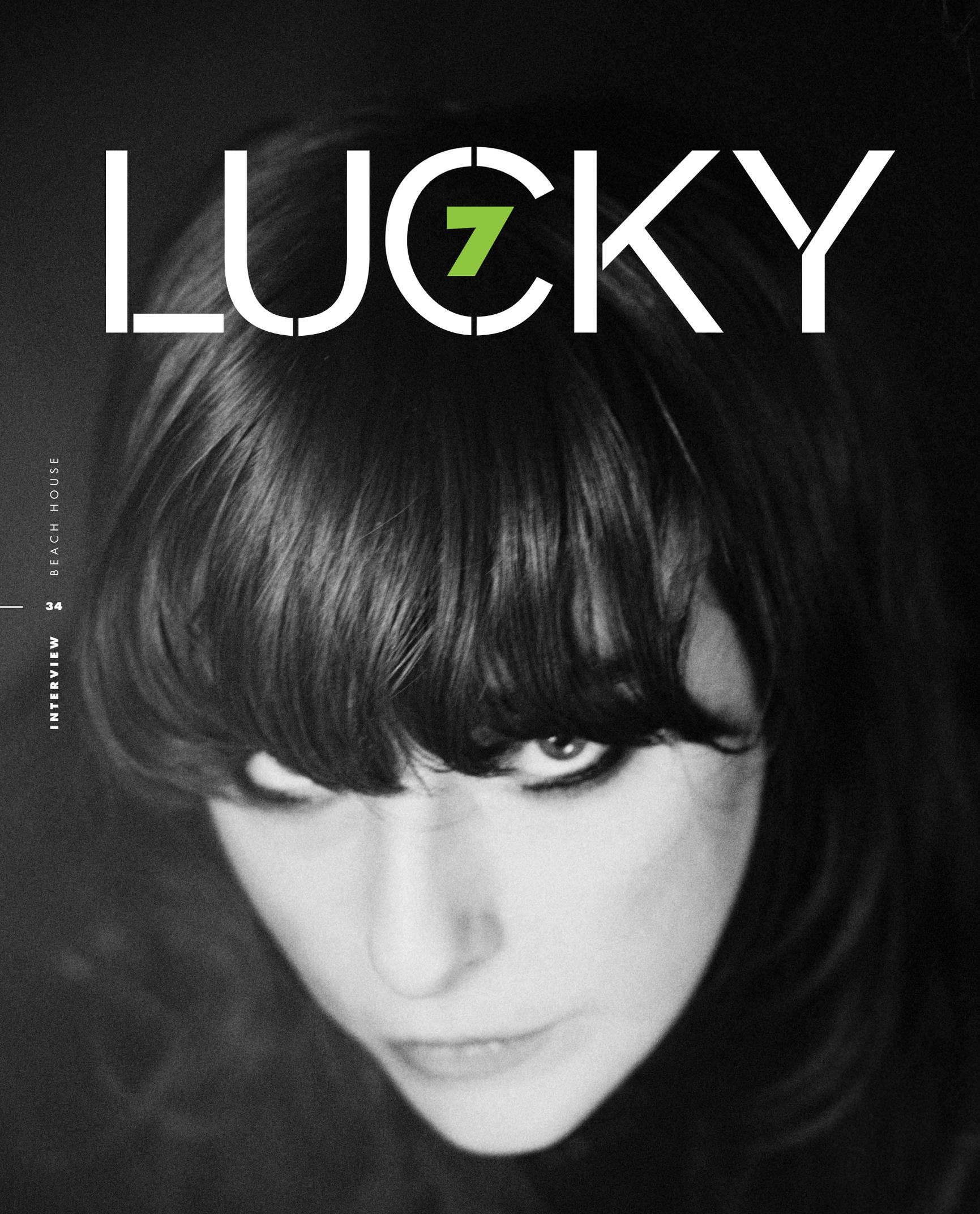
From a different angle, Savage also namechecks George Clinton's Funkadelic, a band he was listening to a lot before the recording of *Wide Awake!:* "I consider Funkadelic to be one of the punkest bands ever, because ideologically, they were so separate from everybody, be it rock or r'n'b, nobody was like them," says Savage. "They didn't have a scene, the whole band was a scene." Add in drummer Max's recent interest in synths and drum machines, and suddenly, the latest iteration of Parquet Courts' music starts to make perfect sense.

Wide Awake! is, in Savage's view, partly an exercise in finding a creative middle ground between punk and electronic music – although: "To me, my ears, because I'm so within it all, it sounds like a Parquet Courts record, it sounds like *us*."

It's almost time for Savage to go to soundcheck. Essentially studious and serious, but someone who shows flashes of humour and pays you the courtesy of trying to answer questions rather than just promoting his wares, he's been good company. Were he your friend, you'd go to him if you were in trouble, although any advice he gave would probably be near-distressingly honest. But there are still a few minutes to talk some more about records and an unexpected influence on Savage's vocal performances on *Wide Awake!*, Divine, the outré, poop-eating star of John Waters' early films and sometime disco singer.

"I love Divine's voice and the way that she didn't try to hide the fact that she was biologically a middle-aged man," says Savage. "Just sing, all gritty, I *love* that." ●

LUCKY



INTERVIEW 34 BEACH HOUSE

Dream-pop duo Beach House are starting afresh on their new album. Vocalist and keys player Victoria Legrand and multi-instrumentalist Alex Scally explain to **Daniel Dylan Wray** why they're in seventh heaven…

"This record feels special to me," says Beach House's Victoria Legrand, speaking of the band's seventh studio album, neatly entitled *7*. It sees the Baltimore dream-pop duo move into a new period of their career. 2017's *B-Sides And Rarities* album was a case of putting the past to bed, along with their previous working methods, to open up a new way of creating that has led to one of their finest records yet. "As you get older," starts Alex Scally, "you can feel like you perpetually do the same thing, but with diminishing returns. You have to find new methods to get past where you were and get past problems you were having."

Not that Beach House's records posed any problems, as such. Their blend of woozy ambience, immersive textures and dreamy melodies has been subtly crafted and honed since their 2006 debut. However, the duo decided they needed to start afresh with this LP, to approach things differently and unlock a personal and creative sense of liberation.

This largely came from changing the way they recorded, as Scally explains: "One thing we hated was waiting forever to record a song after you wrote it. That was a real problem for us. By the time you get to the studio, you're not fully excited about half of the songs any longer. So this time around, we built a practice-space studio and did most of the recording there, and then went and finished them in a studio." It was in the studio where they would work with Pete Kember, aka Sonic Boom, on production. "We didn't want to work with someone who had a method," says Scally. "We wanted the method to be free. We wanted the method to be just what is best for the song, not like, 'We do things in this order and this way'. Pete provided a lot of counterbalance. He's a very mystical and intelligent person. When he saw a problem, he had this keen vision about how to move on. He was very good at preventing studio malaise from occurring. He's a very sweet, awesome dude."

The sense of change that this working method brought about has been a deeply inspiring one for Legrand, who feels that Beach House have progressed into a new sonic chapter.

"I think we've always been very good at understanding the changes within us, non-verbally," she says. "I think that this record is a symptom of that. We wanted

Photography by Shawn Brackbill

BEACH HOUSE
Edited highlights

Devotion
2006

Teen Dream
2010

Bloom
2012

Depression Cherry
2015

7
2018

to do things differently, and the songs responded to that. The actual music was a response to that feeling. We didn't overthink anything, we weren't worried about anything. That's one of the benefits of being more experienced, you get the feeling of doing whatever the fuck you like. It has energy to it when you do that. There's something about youth where you always assume young people have more of a 'fuck that' attitude, but actually, when you're young, you're kind of paralysed by your fears and insecurities. I think it's the other way around: the older you get the more punk you become. *7*, to me, feels like an extension of that. It's a new beginning and a new era."

FAIT ACCOMPLI

This beginning of a new era was welcomed in by the most fun and productive recording sessions the band have ever done, according to Scally: "It was so great. So much of what ended up being on this record came from the moment something was being written. A lot of times, those early moments of writing songs have a feel that can't be recreated, so a lot of the album is just those moments of the song being written, and we kept it. It was the most fun recording process we've ever had." Both have a vaguely spiritual essence to them as they speak about the album and the project, and the stars aligning and fate falling into place. "I think everything happens for a reason," Scally says. "It takes a long time to change in life, I think. I'm only 35, but I'm starting to get that feeling. Maybe one thing can only happen with the step in front of it. That's just how many steps that took for us [to reach this stage]."

While Beach House have been very astute in creating their own tone and sense of personality on their records, Scally feels this has often led to some people missing the subtle nuances in their evolution. "One of the things that people have been saying to us for years is, 'This record sounds just like the last record', and so maybe people will now say that this doesn't. I don't know. To some extent, it's out of our control. We've never felt that our records sounded alike. The way people perceive things is a mystery to us."

7 is notable in its leap for the band in terms of tone, pace, a change of instruments and dynamism – but it's not as if the band have completely eradicated the Beach House of old. There's still the core essence, sound and identity that has floated through all their previous records present here. Even when Beach House are making their greatest creative leap, it's still one that shows a thoughtful subtlety. This is largely because Scally and Legrand are so in tune with one another that they can't help but make music that is symbiotic of their relationship and tastes. "I think we're paired and connected in such a way that I can't really see us not liking the same music," Scally says. "I think it's one of the reasons why we're able to work so easily together. Our definition of what is good and what should be an end point is so similar that it allows the working relationship to be so easy."

> "THE OLDER YOU GET THE MORE PUNK YOU BECOME. *7*, TO ME, FEELS LIKE AN EXTENSION OF THAT"

LET GO FROM THE GET-GO

The sense of letting go that the pair applied on this record – such as immediately recording what they wrote and not worrying about whether the songs could be replicated live with their traditional guitar and keyboard setup – lent itself to a new vitality in their attitudes, Legrand says: "I think music must be made, you just have to make it. You just have to do it. I believe in action and doing it. There's an animalistic quality about that, to move yourself forward and not be too mental about it. There's a propulsive energy to this record and it's invigorating. There is a feeling of change, a sense of future."

Lyrically, the album touches upon "the societal insanity of 2016-17", but would Beach House call this record a political one? "I think the delineation between a political record and a non-political record is a bit of an overly wrought discussion," responds Scally. "In some ways, all music is political, because it deals with people. Where you draw the line as

New Beach House songs such as *Dive* add the sonic imprint of Pete Kember (aka Sonic Boom) to their dreamlike sound

PETE KEMBER

Edited highlights

SPACEMEN 3

The Perfect Prescription
1987

SPACEMEN 3

Playing With Fire
1989

SONIC BOOM

Spectrum
1990

SPECTRUM

Soul Kiss
1992

EXPERIMENTAL AUDIO RESEARCH

Beyond The Pale
1996

to what makes something political is different for all people. So, yeah, I'd say it's a political record, but also argue it's hard not to make a political record right now, it's dominating every stream of society." Legrand adds: "Like everyone else, we're feeling the chaos and feeling the darkness, the violence and the injustice. The difference is that not everybody has the opportunity, or the luck, to express that. I wouldn't say it's an overtly political record, but it's one that has force in it."

However, tumultuous times feed into the sonic world that Beach House create, according to Legrand, who says the band are not interested in striving for perfection. "I personally believe in imperfection. I believe in the perfection of imperfection. I believe in the balance of darkness and light. I believe that you need to have the shit to find the gold. You can't have a perfect utopia. I don't aspire for perfection. I aspire for release and transformation and change and chaos, to a certain extent. I think things need to be upended in order to fall back into place."

For Scally, he is able to pluck some beauty from times of despair, too. "These twin movements – the rise of populism along with gender and race equality – one thing is frightening to me and the other is really exhilarating. I find it to be a very exciting moment, but also scary." Legrand also chimes in to reinforce Scally's feelings of positivity about the future. "I don't feel bleak, I don't feel cynical. I feel positive and have a certain amount of strength. I have belief in things. I'm an optimistic person, for the most part. I believe in people and that will always continue to inspire me and Alex." ●

BOOK EXTRACT

GOING FOR A SONG

Garth Cartwright's book *Going For A Song* charts the rise, fall and rebirth of the UK's indie record shops. In this exclusive extract, Brian Epstein swaps drama school for managing his parents' record shop and ends up changing the world

NEMS of Liverpool is the record shop that changed the world. No NEMS, then, quite likely, no Beatles. No Beatles, then no British Invasion. No British Invasion, then the UK music scene remains a backwater akin to, say the French music scene (with better singers, if none quite so chic). And, without the phenomenon The Beatles unleashed, rock music and British culture (and tax revenue, tourism and national self-esteem) would all be irredeemably poorer. As far as retail achievements go, that's quite an achievement.

Such speculation might be wrong-headed as, had NEMS never opened, Lennon and McCartney would still have formed the group, played The Cavern and Hamburg's Star-Club, written songs, rocked hard and commanded devoted fans in Liverpool and Hamburg. But would they have got any further? The Beatles had talent and character in spades, but so did many musicians who never achieved success. What the band needed was a record deal. And no one was giving those out in the port cities the band worked.

Music fans all have their stories of artists with huge potential/great performances/fabulous songs etc, who never achieved any real level of recognition. And it wasn't the lack of talent that stymied them. It was the lack of luck. Luck goes way beyond talent in establishing who tastes success. Effective management comes a not-too-distant second.

Mr NEMS: Brian Epstein displays his favourite stock

The likes of Def Leppard, James Blunt and One Direction possess, at best, a modicum of musical talent, but all were blessed with luck and effective management. While Errol Linton, Big Joe Louis and Little George Sueref are striking live performers, possess a unique sound and strong songs, but lack luck and management. Who are Errol Linton and Big Joe and Little George? Do yourself a favour and find out.

Anyway, if it had not been for Harry and Queenie Epstein's son, Brian, and his success at turning the family's musical-instrument shop into a thriving record shop, then there is a strong possibility that The Beatles would be just another band that a handful of people who were at The Cavern and the Star-Club fondly reminisce about. This, then, is the story of how a Liverpool record shop changed the course of popular music.

TOP SHOP

In the early 1930s, Harry Epstein launched a Liverpool furniture store. Next door was The North End Road Music Stores and Harry's success in selling furniture found him purchasing NEMS, developing its stock of instruments, sheet music and 78s. Highly regarded – Paul McCartney and Cilla Black's families bought pianos there on extended-purchase plans – NEMS proved a success. This was in Walton, a largely residential suburb north east of the city centre, and as business grew post-WW2, Harry decided to expand into downtown Liverpool. And he wanted his oldest son, Brian, to run the new store.

Brian Epstein had different ideas. Born in 1934, the dreamy, gay youth flunked out of public schools, got discharged from National Service and demonstrated very little interest in joining NEMS. Instead, he wanted nothing more than to flee Liverpool and his loving, if confining, Jewish family for the anonymity of a bigger city. Initially, the teenage Brian had told his father he wanted to be a dress designer but Harry angrily refused to consider the idea, putting Brian to work in the furniture store. A gifted salesman, Brian made it clear this was not where he wanted to be, instead enrolling at RADA drama college in London. Harry always felt his son should be working in the family business and, each time Brian returned to Liverpool, Harry would ask: 'When are you going to come to your senses and come and work for the family?' In 1957, during his third year at RADA, Brian admitted he hated being a student and agreed to manage a branch of NEMS Harry planned on opening in Great Charlotte Street.

Brian took command of setting up the Great Charlotte Street NEMS with his younger brother Clive, whose role was to manage the white goods and furniture-based electrical goods department on the first floor. Brian insisted the firm expand the ground floor's stock from pianos and radios to include a far greater range of records. This achieved, the Great Charlotte Street NEMS opened on 7 December 1957 with an appearance by Anne Shelton (a singer popular with British forces in WW2) and a large crowd turned out for the occasion. On the first morning, the record department took over £20; in Walton, the record department took £70 in a good week. Brian Epstein had found his forte.

Brian's eye for detail, constant desire to improve stock and success in tracing hard-to-find recordings won NEMS acclaim and the shop gained further renown for being the first in the city to stock OST (original soundtracks) and West End and Broadway cast albums. Market trader Mick O'Toole remembers purchasing records from Epstein on Saturday evenings after working at St Johns Market: spotting Brian behind the counter of the (by that time closed) NEMS store, Mick would knock on the shop door and Epstein would let him into the shop, informing him to "always give a knock on the door – if I am there doing the books, I will open up". Mr Epstein, as everyone knew him, would always be helpful. It wasn't like other shops where the record racks might be just an add-on to a TV shop and you were considered to be a bit of a nuisance. He genuinely cared about music and would not hesitate to order something for you."

With record sales growing, Brian engaged in the thrill of ensuring NEMS provided a

The Beatles command NEMS' stairs, 1962

service second to none. "Most record shops I'd been in were lousy," said Epstein when reflecting on NEMS' success to Hunter Davies, for The Beatles' official biography. "The minute a record became popular, it went out of stock. I aimed to have everything in stock, even the most way-out records. I did this by ordering in triplicate any record that anyone ever wanted. I reckoned that if one person asked for something, there must be others who would want it too. I even had three copies of the LP *The Birth Of A Baby*, just because one person had wanted it."

Customers were encouraged to leave an order for a record if NEMS failed to have it in stock and stock was checked religiously throughout the day. Brian also worked out his own top 20 sellers in the shop, checking this twice daily. Having a NEMS Top 20 worked both as a gimmick for customers and to let Epstein know what he should be stocking up on. Two years after opening, NEMS in Charlotte Street employed 30 staff, its extensive pop and classical department covering two floors. Business went well and, in 1959, Harry decided to open another store at 12-14 Whitechapel, right in the heart of Liverpool's central shopping district.

Again, Brian took control and the shop's opening found movie star/singer Anthony Newley doing the honours. Newspapers reported that crowds comparable to a cup-final turnout surged around NEMS, excited by both Newley's appearance and how the new record shop represented showbiz, technology and rock 'n' roll. Epstein loved the glamour and clamour surrounding his new shop; in selling records he had found a passion that, for the time, supplanted his love of theatre and the yearning of a lonely heart. The new NEMS store continued to offer white goods on the ground floor but its basement was what generated all the excitement: here a 42-foot, U-shaped counter faced racks and racks of records. Above which a suspended ceiling decorated with a thousand LP sleeves attracted much attention. The floating ceiling was Brian's idea and many shops would subsequently copy this.

STOCK THE WORLD

The Whitechapel branch quickly went on to out perform every other record shop/bar across the North. Having the best record shop north of London was not enough for Brian and he constantly aimed at improving NEMS, devising a string system to ensure the staff were aware when stock got low. He scouted for talented employees, notably hiring Peter Brown from Lewis Department Store (Brown worked in Lewis's music section: George Harrison would later reveal that, pre-fame, he shoplifted 45s from here), with an offer of a higher salary and a commission on sales. The NEMS stores remained paragons of department-store service with the male staff in suits and the females in dresses with NEMS embroidered on the breast pocket. Customers were addressed as "sir" and "madam", while Brian and Clive were "Mr Brian" and "Mr Clive".

The record business was booming across the UK – a *Melody Maker* headline in the 8 April, 1961 issue proclaimed "Disc Sales Climb To Record Peak" and noted that the sales tally for January of that year had grossed £1,643,000. This was 20% higher than the previous January and 3% higher than the record set in January 1958. Experts quoted in the feature put the sales boom down to teenagers finding nothing of interest on TV so turning their passions to music. How passionate these teens could be the UK would soon find out but, back then, no one

MORRISSEY

A Moss Side shopper

In 1963, a young Steven Morrissey first ventured into Manchester's Paul Marsh Records, so experiencing something akin to an epiphany. "Paul Marsh is a small shop with exposed wooden floorboards; pop singles lodged upright in pigeon holes behind the counter and LPs conveniently racked for small boys to study in occultish ways," he wrote in *Autobiography*. When the singer appeared on *Desert Island Discs*, Kirsty Young asked him to tell her about Paul Marsh Records.

Morrissey: "Is that really a serious question? Good grief, yes. Well, any education that I now presently have was gained at this record shop in Moss Side in Manchester in the 60s, where I was raised. I was fascinated by this little record shop with wooden floorboards exposed, with sawdust on the floor. And I would go there as often as I could as a five-year-old, six-year-old. And I would simply stand and examine everything, and read everything."

Kirsty: "What did you like about it?"

Morrissey: "I was completely entranced by the song, recorded song, and the emotion that came from people singing. I found it so beautiful and the recorded noise, the recorded song, I thought was the most powerful, beautiful thing. And I still believe that."

What is fascinating about Paul Marsh Records – viewed from this century – is that it largely catered to Moss Side's burgeoning Jamaican community. Thus the young Mozza is likely to have heard lots of ska and rocksteady there. In the 21st century, he would revive the Attack record label (back then a subsidiary of Trojan Records) on which to release his own albums, inspired by the memory of a record shop with sawdust-covered floors.

expected anything like Beatlemania. Especially not Epstein, whose Whitechapel NEMS stood nearby a dingy basement club called The Cavern.

Brian's listening tastes rarely extended beyond show tunes and light classical music but he studied the charts and ensured NEMS began selling local music magazine *Mersey Beat* from its first issue on 6 July, 1961, guessing it would be purchased by teenagers. Proven correct, Brian then asked *Mersey Beat*'s editor Bill Harry if he could contribute a record column. His first column appeared in the third issue of *Mersey Beat* on 3 August, 1961 and was called 'Stop The World – And Listen To Everything In It: Brian Epstein Of NEMS'. In August 1961, Brian took out an advertisement in *Mersey Beat* proclaiming NEMS hosted: 'The finest record selections in the North' – EMI confirming NEMS as their best customer north of London.

Mersey Beat was the first publication to champion local band The Beatles, yet Brian would claim to not have heard of them until that fateful day when a youth called Raymond Jones came in, asking for a 45 of *My Bonnie*.

MERSEY BEAT

Brian had no record of the single being available and, in his autobiography *A Cellarful Of Noise*, he states how Jones taunted him, "You won't have heard of them. It's by a group called The Beatles…" Beat on the brat! *My Bonnie* actually turned out to be by Tony Sheridan And The Beat Brothers, and Epstein, who ordered at least one copy of each new record released in the UK, was frustrated to find that NEMS had no stock of said 45 (because it had only been released on a German label).

Even more humiliating must have been learning that The Beat Brothers were actually The Beatles, Liverpool's No. 1 band. As the North's No. 1 Record Dealer, he felt slighted not to be aware of this.

Interest piqued, Epstein – accompanied by NEMS employee Alistair Taylor – went to a lunchtime performance by The Beatles at The Cavern Club. The dank, smelly club wasn't to Epstein's taste, but he keenly watched the future of popular music perform, then dropped into their cupboard-sized dressing room to say "hello". The Beatles recognised the smartly suited Epstein, as they regularly visited NEMS, hanging out in the store's listening booths where they studied the new US 45s ("play the other side" being their frequent request) and attempted to chat up the female staff, much to Brian's annoyance. He may have initially considered the leather-clad rockers as "yobs", but Epstein heard enough in The Cavern that lunchtime to convince him they deserved his attention: he would later invite the band to visit him at his NEMS office where he would offer to manage them – quite a risk for this cautious man, especially as their previous manager Alan Williams had warned Epstein, when he enquired as to whether the band were still contracted to him, "not to touch them with a fucking barge pole".

Yet Epstein, bored after having launched two successful shops, wanted to engage in the creative arts again. Fortune would have it that he came across the most creative artists in Liverpool. Brian's role as manager of The Beatles is beyond the realm of this piece, but I'll note that when he offered to manage the band, they truly got lucky. Without his belief, dedication and contacts with London record labels (via NEMS), it is unlikely the band would have won a record deal. Indeed, on a Hamburg retail-management course run by Deutsche Grammophon, Epstein befriended Bob Boast from HMV's flagship Oxford Street shop. On 8 May 1962, a flustered Epstein visited Boast at HMV, complaining of being turned down by everyone at British record labels (even freelance producer Joe Meek dismissed The Beatles' demo as "just another bunch of noise, copying other people's music"). At that time, HMV had a small recording studio on the first floor where budding artists could make 78rpm demonstration discs. Boast took Brian there and introduced him to disc cutter Jim Foy, who, impressed by the original songs on Epstein's tape, introduced him to Sid Coleman of Ardmore & Beechwood, one of EMI's top publishing companies. When Epstein made it clear he was looking for a recording deal, Coleman called George Martin, head of A&R for Parlophone Records, an EMI subsidiary. And so the future of popular British music got on its way.*

BRIAN'S BLESSING

What did four Liverpool urchins make of having a manager who ran the best record shop in the North? Like bees to pollen, The Beatles swarmed through NEMS' stock, listening to whatever took their fancy, studying both British and American releases and learning new tunes for their live performances from newly released records that had not been hits. NEMS served as a finishing school for The Beatles, allowing them access to far more records than almost all of their contemporaries.

Roger Armstrong of Ace Records observes: "I always wondered how The Beatles got hold of some of the songs they covered, as several of them were virtually unknown in the UK. For a long time, the story went that Liverpool seamen bought back R&B records from America and this is how the local musicians got to hear them. But I'm sure that's a myth.

NEMS ACTED AS A FINISHING SCHOOL FOR THE BEATLES, PROVIDING ACCESS TO MORE RECORDS THAN THEIR RIVALS

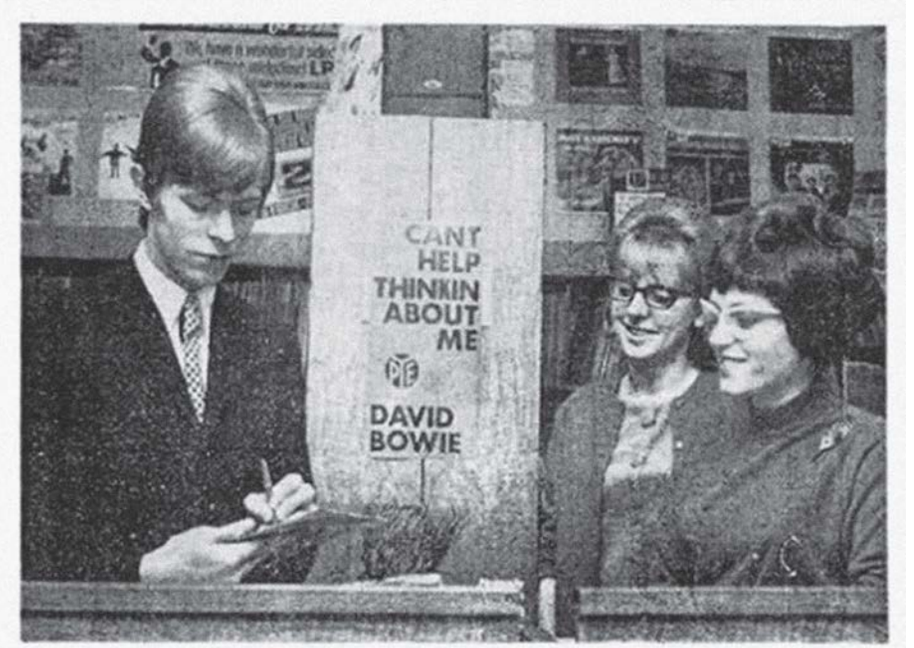
See, it turns out that every song The Beatles covered was released in the UK. Often only in very small numbers: but NEMS was one of the record shops that ordered a copy of every new release, so The Beatles would have found those records in NEMS. My guess is that Brian Epstein let them have free run of the shop and they listened to everything and anything. Back then, every city had a gramophone shop and these shops would, if they chose to, get one copy of every record released – more than one if it was a popular artist, obviously. So The Beatles found obscure gems by digging through NEMS' stock and taking them home to learn – all with Brian's blessing."

Prior to NEMS' rise, Liverpool's foremost specialist record shop was Hessy's on

DAVID BOWIE

Bromley record-shop boy

Born in Brixton, David Jones would shift, aged six in 1953, with his parents to Bromley, the Kent suburb that is now part of Greater London. Here, young David developed a strong attraction to music at an early age and would frequent London record shops across his adolescence, regularly buying blues and folk at Dobell's. Soho's Musicland and One Stop Records provided import LPs by The Stooges and Velvet Underground (among others) that would influence Bowie's sound and vision. But, before Jones had ever explored Soho, before he ever sang in a band, he was a regular customer at Medhurst's, a Bromley department store based in a vast Victorian building that sold furniture and furnishings – and records. Here, the thin, white youth would check out the latest records, regularly popping in after school to soak up new tunes in the shop's listening booths. He then got a Saturday job at A.T. Furlong & Sons, a small music shop on Bromley's High Street that sold records, sheet music, radiograms and TVs. As he said many years later: "So, aged 13, maybe 14, I got my first real big break. Saturday mornings and sometimes Wednesday after school, I would dress to impress and style my hair just right before making my way to Bromley South. It was at Furlong's I got my first real taste of how things could be… For absolute integrity and a huge stock of jazz, R&B and pure blues, there was nowhere else like it until London itself. It was here that the power of recorded music struck home. I don't mean it was where I discovered music (I had already discovered that power through Little Richard and Elvis), no, it was more how those bits of black plastic could affect other people's behaviour. Getting a job behind the counter at Vic's place, albeit part-time, was enough to boost my cred' a hundred fold. It had an effect on the girls… an effect I liked, and, erm, another effect on the boys… quite a different effect."



SINGER David Bowie has been touring the country visiting leading record stores to meet the staff and distribute publicity material for his first record, "Can't Help Thinkin' About Me." Here he is seen autographing a copy of his disc for Pauline Williams and Mary McGuckin at the record department of Cranes in Coimore Circus, Priory Ringway, Birmingham.

Manchester Street. Hessy's had a well stocked record bar alongside gramophones, TVs, sheet music and musical instruments: John Lennon bought his first electric guitar here after his Aunt Mimi had left a deposit of £17 in 1959 and the other Beatles would follow – the shop's lax hire-purchase arrangements allowing budding rockers to get their hands on otherwise unaffordable equipment. When Epstein began managing The Beatles, his first task involved covering a debt of £200 the band owed to Hessy's. Poetic justice of sorts, seeing as NEMS' rise had shut down that shop's record bar.

READY FOR TAKEOFF

Being managed by Epstein didn't just enrich The Beatles' repertoire and cover their debts; his professionalism and understanding of rock 'n' roll as part of the entertainment industry ensured the band became a less raucous, more amenable unit. Brian was bright and bright-eyed, a man of considerable personal charm, and this helped the band throughout. Initially, he focused his energies on The Beatles while continuing to manage both shops, combining both when he ensured NEMS' position as a chart-return shop listed thousands more sales of the band's debut 45 (to ensure it crawled into the Top 20). Founding NEMS Enterprises, Brian handed day-to-day running of the shops to a manager. When The Beatles shot to No. 2 in early 1963 and initiated Beatlemania, he lost all interest in retail. Not that he forgot his NEMS staff – many of whom went to work for Brian at NEMS Enterprises (including brother Clive). By June 1964, Harry Epstein, realising his sons had moved into a more lucrative area of the entertainment market, decided to sell NEMS. Long-term staffers such as Peter Brown stayed on for several months but, disliking the new owners, left to join NEMS Enterprises, now based in London.

The Beatles presaged not just a revolution in popular music and fashion, they also indirectly shaped a demand for record shops, specifically those that catered to a passionate youth fan base. This change in record retail wouldn't get going until the mid 60s, Boots and Smiths enjoying the largesse from the vast record sales being clocked up. The chain that missed out was Woolworths – selling only Embassy records, Woolies issued imitation Beatles 45s before quitting selling records altogether when the Levy family sold their labels (including Embassy) and studios to CBS in 1964. Woolies then chose to sit out the 60s selling Fab Four dolls, wigs and lunchboxes. If the 60s were swinging, Woolworths appeared unaware of this. ●

* *EMI then owned HMV, thus a bronze plaque honouring said meeting is fitted outside 363 Oxford Street.*

This extract is adapted from Garth Cartwright's excellent new in-depth account of the rise, fall and rebirth of the UK's independent record shops, Going For A Song – A Chronicle Of The UK Record Shop, published by Flood Gallery. It's available now, from all good high-street stores.

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45s

THE 7" SINGLES **THAT CHANGED THE WORLD**

The 7" single is popular music's most magical artefact, possessed with a power that far outstrips its modest physical dimensions – Johnny Marr described 45s as "absolutely powerful, possibly otherworldly objects". **Gary Tipp** salutes this most enduring format…

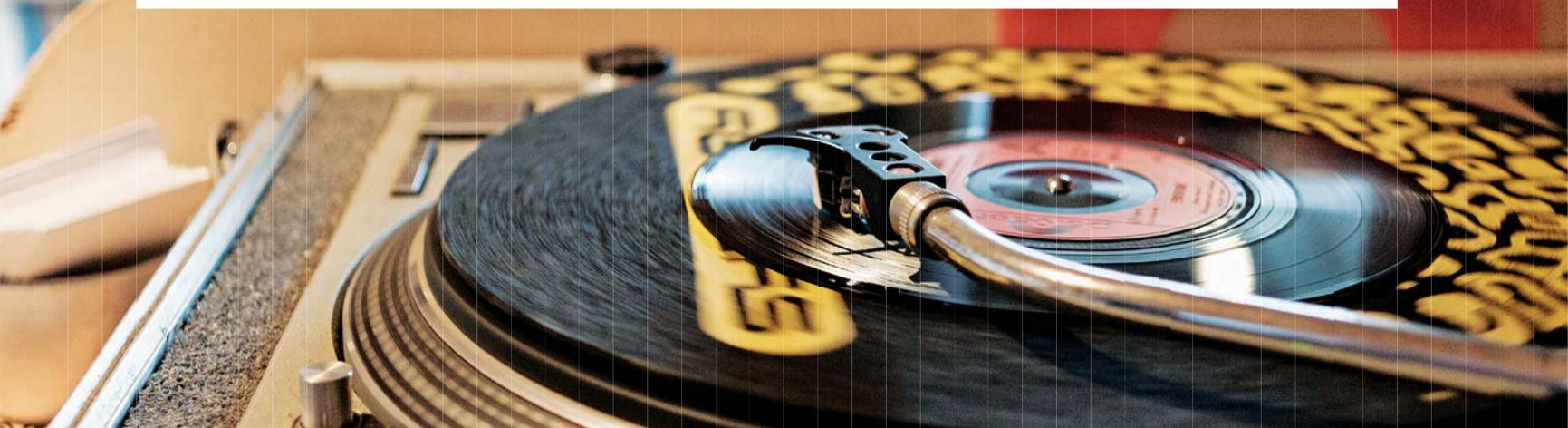
In the eternal debate about the vinyl format of preference, the 45 is often dismissed – too easily – as the starter to the LP's main course. Yep, both can sound great, both have fantastic artwork, both are pleasingly tactile… but the album is serious, substantial and played for keeps, while the 7" single is frivolous, short-lived and, ultimately, throwaway.

While we can kind of see the argument, weaknesses can also be regarded as strengths, and what makes the 7" single so magical is its power to instantly gratify, its ability to get the job done and dusted in approximately two minutes and 57 seconds. The physical rush of hearing Chuck Berry's guitar on *Maybellene* for the very first time, or the adrenaline thrill caused by the first 29 seconds or so of The Damned's *New Rose* – sorry, but you just don't get a spike in your serotonin from an album in the same way.

Over the course of what is coming up to a 70-year history, there are any number of 45s that have been able to shape the world of music around them and lay down a lasting influence on what is to come; and this actually makes them far from ephemeral. We've drawn a line in the sand at 45 singles, which was no easy task. The 7" single is great at ushering in new scenes and genres, and it is these pioneering 45s that we pay respect to across the following pages.

As ever, we've tried to give you an indication of how much the 45s in question would cost and, wherever possible, this is done on UK first presses. Also, while we've tried to keep our list of music-shaping singles to the 7" format, inevitably, the latter-day releases in our list were also available on 12".

What we do know is that if you happen to be beginning your collection, this is a pretty good starting point…



LOVESICK BLUES

HANK WILLIAMS (1949)

MGM RECORDS £15-£20

A colossus of country music and a doggone progenitor of rock 'n' roll, Williams' first No. 1 single in the US embodies his characteristically emotional, desperately heartfelt approach to singing and songwriting.

Listen, do you want to know a secret?

The 45 is being put to good use…

Starting with seven tracks by seven artists, each pressed 100 times on 7" vinyl, Secret 7" invites designers and artists to produce one-of-a-kind record sleeves to be sold anonymously for charity. Past high-profile creatives have included Yoko Ono, Gilbert & George, Ai Weiwei and Antony Gormley. This year, the event includes tracks never before on single, by The Clash, Jeff Buckley, Jimi Hendrix, Primal Scream and Eurythmics. We spoke to founder Kevin King…

Why did you choose the 7" single for the project?

"I was working at a record label when I had the idea. I chose to focus on the 7" to channel people's designs into interpretations around a single track; it felt like a good-size canvas when approaching people to design for our cause."

Do you regard record sleeves as works of art

"I see the two things you're talking about as fluid. Artwork for a record sleeve can end up in a museum, like Julian Opie's portraits of Blur, and artwork created with a museum in mind can end up on record sleeves, such as *Journal For Plague Lovers*."

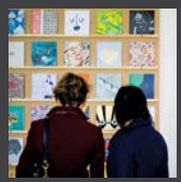
Talk us through the process of the sale day?

"The process often begins the day before sale day, when our first-come-first-served queue starts! Once people are let in, they take the sleeves they want from the exhibition walls and make their way to the checkout. They pay their money directly to our good cause (this year, it's Mind, the mental health charity), then make their way to a second checkout, where we reveal the secrets of who the sleeve artist is and which track goes inside."

Which have been your favourite sleeves so far?

"The two that stand out in my mind are from Non-Format and Boneface; they were both for *Sledgehammer* in 2015. Side by side, they encapsulate the essence of the project, in that two people can interpret the artwork for one song in such wonderfully different ways. Non-Format's record was encased in a concrete sleeve, while Boneface created a fully packaged toy figure."

The exhibition is to be held on The Jetty on Greenwich Peninsula 8-23 June: see secret-7.com for details.



FALLING AND LAUGHING

ORANGE JUICE (1980)

POSTCARD £100

Released on the semi-legendary Postcard Records, Orange Juice provided a joyful alternative to the sturm und drang of post-punk's austere intellectualism. The Edinburgh band's debut single, *Falling And Laughing* was a little ray of sunshine; with a young Edwyn Collins at the helm, they sounded every bit as fresh as their name suggested.

TYPICAL GIRLS

THE SLITS (1979)

ISLAND £10

The Slits were gobby and fearlessly uncompromising; they also gloriously redefined the perception of what a girl band could be. Their classic debut single *Typical Girls* is driven by the band's distinctive punky-reggae rhythms with a less-than-faithful version of *Heard It Through The Grapevine* on the B-side. It was the 45 that set the stage for the riot grrrls to come.

UNDER ME SLENG TENG

WAYNE SMITH (1985)

JAMMY'S £20

The digital bassline of Wayne Smith's irresistible 45 was the first time computerised rhythms were used in Jamaican recordings and sparked a mini-revolution. It drew dancehall reggae closer to the production values of its cousin, US hip-hop. The rhythm may have been an attempt to recreate Eddie Cochran's *Somethin' Else*.

MOTÖRHEAD

MOTÖRHEAD (1977)

CHISWICK £20

Lemmy named his post-Hawkwind outfit after a track he'd previously recorded with the druggy space rockers; it was a safer bet than his first choice – the less-than-radio-friendly Bastard. This breakneck ode to speed-freakery bridged the gap between metal/punk and would go on to have a profound effect on any number of bands, including Metallica.

PEOPLE GET READY

THE IMPRESSIONS (1965)

KENT £20

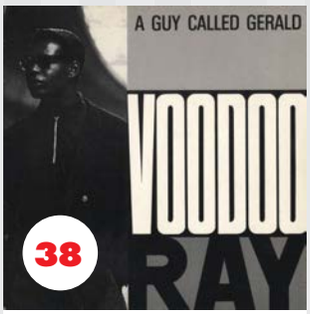
Helmed by Curtis Mayfield, The Impressions bridged the energy of 50s R&B and the increased sophistication of 60s soul. Mayfield was one of the first black songwriters to bring a social and political charge into soul music.

LITTLE JOHNNY JEWEL

TELEVISION (1975)

ORK £20

Recorded and released in 1975, this lost treasure of a 45 reveals that somehow Television were post-punk before punk had even arrived. The painfully intellectual art-rockers laid down the foundation for guitar-orientated alt-rock in the US.



VOODOO RAY

A GUY CALLED GERALD (1988)

RHAM! £6

Inspired by the innovative, dancefloor-filling house-music sounds emanating from Chicago and Detroit, *Voodoo Ray* creator and 808 State member Gerald Simpson was a regular visitor to The Haçienda. The UK's first acid-house single was a groundbreaking release and a significant precursor to the fast-developing Madchester scene.

THE MODERN AGE

THE STROKES (2001)

ROUGH TRADE £25

On their debut 45, New York pretty boys The Strokes gave indie in the 2000s a much-needed shot in the arm with a return to rock 'n' roll basics. Sure, it was retro, but their reference points – specifically The Velvet Underground – were everlastingly cool, and they wouldn't be seen dead in an ill-fitting charity-shop plaid shirt.

REBEL GIRL

BIKINI KILL (1993)

KILL ROCK STARS £15

Bikini Kill, led by Kathleen Hanna, were radical feminist pioneers of the riot-grrrl movement in the 1990s, and a socially charged punk-rock force to be reckoned with. *Rebel Girl* is the scene's most emblematic 45. Former Runaway Joan Jett produced the track as well as contributing backing vocals and guitar.

YOU SEND ME

SAM COOKE (1957)

LONDON £40

With this joyously romantic self-penned ballad, Sam Cooke opened up his brand of sweet Southern soul to a mainstream pop audience. He was one of the first black artists to hold such strong crossover appeal, and his gliding delivery has subsequently proved a strong influence on countless scores of performers.

Single file

A timeline history of the 7"

1949
The first 7" single, on green vinyl, no less, is issued in the US: *Texarkana Baby* by Eddy Arnold.

1952
The first UK 45s are issued by EMI. The *NME* establishes the first Singles Chart.

1958
7"s outsell the 78 format.

1963
Love Me Do enters the chart. The Beatles go on to sell over 22 million singles.

1965
Bob Dylan breaks with convention to release a six-minute-plus single, *Like A Rolling Stone*.

1969
Led Zeppelin impose a 'no singles' policy, as focus shifts to the LP.

1976
New Rose by The Damned ushers in a new wave of popularity.

1978
The Cars' *My Best Friend's Girl* is released on 7" picture disc.

1979
7" sales peak in the UK in 1979, when a staggering 89 million of them are sold.

1980
Bow Wow Wow's *C30 C60 C90 Go* is the first cassette single (or 'cassingle', if you will).

1985
The CD single rears its ugly head. Hiss…

1994
Wet Wet Wet's *Love Is All Around* is the last No. 1 to sell more than 50,000 7" singles.

2001
Annual singles sales dip below 180,000.

2005
Physical sales are combined with downloads.

2006
Crazy by Gnarls Barkley gets to No. 1 on the strength of downloads alone.

2007
White Stripes' *Icky Thump* sells 10,000 copies in two days.

2008
The first Record Store Day helps to reinvigorate the format.

The UK's most collected 7" singles

With over 375,000 members, Discogs is a well of vinyl-related information. Here are the top 45 most bought and sold 45s on their site…

What follows tells us a lot about the demographic of the majority of 7" collectors out there, and also their fondness for certain musical genres and bands. It will be no shock that, with eight, The Beatles possess the most entries, but what is surprising is they're the only 60s act (save for Pink Floyd) to make an appearance – with the list dominated by punk and new-wave bands from the late 70s (which, admittedly, was a golden era for 45s); the Sex Pistols, The Jam and The Clash all lay claim to multiple entries.

1 Love Will Tear Us Apart
Joy Division (1980)
Factory £10
Joy Division's enduring classic was released just weeks after lead singer Ian Curtis' death. The lyrics reveal the troubles in his marriage he was having with his wife Deborah, who had the song title inscribed on his gravestone.

2 Pretty Vacant
Sex Pistols (1977)
£10

3 God Save The Queen
Sex Pistols (1977)
£10

4 TVOD/Warm Leatherette
The Normal (1978)
Mute £15
The Normal is the recording name of electronic music champion Daniel Miller, the pioneering founder of Mute Records. Both tracks on this double A-sided 45 are influenced by the J.G. Ballard novel *Crash*.

5 Magical Mystery Tour
The Beatles (1967)
Parlophone £60

6 The Model
Kraftwerk (1981)
EMI £4

7 Going Underground
The Jam (1980)
Polydor £8
Released at the height of Jam-mania, *Going Underground* was the band's first chart-topper and went straight in at No. 1. It was the first single to do so since Slade's *Merry Christmas Everybody* in 1973.

8 Spiral Scratch
Buzzcocks (1977)
New Hormones £60

9 Ghost Town
The Specials (1981)
2 Tone £8

10 Too Much Too Young
The Specials (1980)
2 Tone £5
Special AKA Live! was only the second EP to top the UK charts following in the considerable wake of *The Roussos Phenomenon* EP. It was also the first live recording to hit the No. 1 slot since Chuck Berry's infantile *My Ding-A-Ling*.

11 She Loves You
The Beatles (1963)
Parlophone £15

12 Hong Kong Garden
Siouxsie And The Banshees (1978)
£5

13 Love Song
The Damned (1979)
Chiswick £8

14 Beat Surrender
The Jam (1982)
Polydor £5

15 I Want To Hold Your Hand
The Beatles (1963)
Parlophone £15

16 Do They Know It's Christmas?
Band Aid (1984)
Mercury £2

17 Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick
Ian Dury & The Blockheads (1978)
Stiff £5
Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick was a huge hit for Dury, so much so that his record label Stiff announced the 45 would be deleted when it reached a million sales. At the end of its original chart run, it had sold a mere 979,000.

18 A Town Called Malice
The Jam (1982)
Polydor £5

19 Ceremony
New Order (1981)
Factory £15

20 We Can Work It Out/ Day Tripper
The Beatles (1965)
Parlophone £20
Released the same day as *Rubber Soul* hit the shops, Lennon had wanted *Day Tripper* to be the single, but was overruled by the other band members. As a compromise, it was marketed as the first double A-side.

21 Procession
New Order (1981)
Factory £10

22 Public Image
Public Image Limited (1978)
Virgin £20
John Lydon's blistering comeback single features one of the great bass intros, courtesy of Jah Wobble. The 45 was issued with a fake newspaper folded over the sleeve. These are the versions that push the price up to £20.

23 Tommy Gun
The Clash (1978)
CBS £8

24 Holidays In The Sun
Sex Pistols (1977)
Virgin £20
In their prime, the Sex Pistols were capable of antagonising almost anybody: including, Belgian travel agents. The *Holidays In The Sun* picture sleeve was hastily withdrawn after the aforementioned complained about the use of one of the designs.

25 Are 'Friends' Electric?
Tubeway Army (1979)
Beggars Banquet £15

26 Relax
Frankie Goes To Hollywood (1983)
ZTT £5

27 Start!
The Jam (1980)
Polydor £5

28 I Feel Fine
The Beatles (1964)
Parlophone £20

29 Another Brick In The Wall (Part II)
Pink Floyd (1979)
Harvest

30 Gangsters
The Specials (1979)
2 Tone £15
The song that sparked the ska revival was inspired by an on-tour incident in France, when the band were held responsible for damage to a hotel. The hotel manager took one of their guitars as a deposit, but at least they got a hit out of it.

31 Oliver's Army
Elvis Costello And The Attractions (1979)
Radar £5

32 Hey Jude
The Beatles (1968)
Apple £10

33 The Cost Of Living EP
The Clash (1979)
CBS £12

34 Teenage Kicks
The Undertones (1978)
Good Vibrations £70
Before its major-label release on Sire, *Teenage Kicks* was issued by Belfast's small indie Good Vibrations. It's this version with a picture sleeve in either pink, yellow or blue that will set you back a cool £70.

35 Golden Brown
The Stranglers (1982)
Liberty £5
For a single that celebrates heroin use, *Golden Brown* has lead a surprisingly mainstream existence. On release, it was made Radio 2's Single Of The Week. More recently, a BBC newsreader attempted to waltz to it on *Strictly Come Dancing*.

36 Being Boiled
The Human League (1978)
Fast £15

37 Something Else
Sex Pistols (1979)
Virgin £7

38 Transmission
Joy Division (1979)
Factory £10

39 Can't Buy Me Love
The Beatles (1964)
Parlophone £20

40 Strawberry Fields Forever/Penny Lane
The Beatles (1967)
Parlophone £15

41 Baggy Trousers
Madness (1980)
Stiff £5

42 Bohemian Rhapsody
Queen (1975)
EMI £5
Freddie Mercury's crazed operatic 45 is the UK's third-best-selling single of all time (behind Elton and Band Aid). When it was re-released to mark Mercury's death, it achieved the distinction of being the only song to be UK Christmas No. 1 twice by the same artist.

43 (White Man) In Hammersmith Palais
The Clash (1978)
CBS £12

44 White Riot
The Clash (1977)
CBS £15

45 Ever Fallen In Love (With Someone You Shouldn't've)
Buzzcocks (1978)
United Artists £5

VIRGINIA PLAIN
ROXY MUSIC (1972)
ISLAND £5
Musical futurists Roxy Music ushered in a new age of art-pop with their ultra-stylised debut 45. The perfect antidote to the lumpy 70s, *Virginia Plain* was gleefully artful, glamorous and otherworldly all in the right proportions. The original 'Virginia Plain' was actually a painting by Ferry, from his art-school days.

BEING BOILED
THE HUMAN LEAGUE (1978)
FAST £15
Human League spearheaded the anti-rock New Pop movement of the early 80s, but their debut single came from a darker, more experimental place. Phil Oakey introduces the 45 by quoting the last words of mass murderer Gary Gilmore – "Okay, ready, let's do it", – before bringing up the subject of silkworm farming.

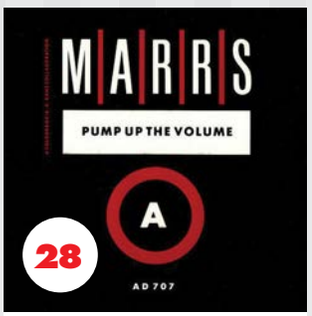
RELEASE THE BATS
THE BIRTHDAY PARTY (1981)
4AD £10
Written as a self-parody of the band's links with the emerging goth scene, the bass-driven pisstake *Release The Bats* ended up being adopted as one of the genre's defining anthems. Nick Cave has since dismissed the association, but not before inspiring dark legions of would-be vampires to pick up a guitar.

POPSCENE
BLUR (1992)
FOOD £15
Essex boys Blur butted up against the all-pervading US grunge scene of the day with a snotty brass-filled slice of British art-school pop. Despite being overlooked at the time, this milestone 45 is now regarded as one of Britpop's very first singles, along with Suede's *The Drowners*, released two months later.

MY BOY LOLLIPOP
MILLIE (1964)
FONTANA £6
Millie Small became Jamaica's first global recording star when her infectious proto-reggae version of a little-known doo-wop number hit No. 2 on both sides of the pond. It opened the floodgates for a ska invasion of the UK.

SPIRAL SCRATCH
BUZZCOCKS (1977)
NEW HORMONES £60
After borrowing cash from friends and family, the Buzzcocks were the first punk band to release a self-financed 45 on their own independent imprint. It was a statement of punk's DIY spirit and inspired a flurry of small labels to follow suit.

PARANOID
BLACK SABBATH (1970)
VERTIGO £15
Black Sabbath had near-enough invented the heavy-metal genre with their first album and, just four months later, they were back in the studio working on the follow-up. The album's lead single, *Paranoid*, was written at the last minute in the studio and was the heaviest 45 to reach the upper echelons of the UK charts, peaking at No. 4.



PUMP UP THE VOLUME
M|A|R|R|S (1987)
4AD £3
This landmark cut-and-paste collaboration between Colourbox and A.R. Kane, two groups both signed to indie label 4AD, is a milestone in the development of UK dance music. It was the first time a hardcore DJ record aimed at the dancefloor, without the faintest trace of traditional song structure, became a chart hit.

ROCKET "88"
JACKIE BRENSTON & HIS DELTA CATS (1951)
CHESS £20
It may say Jackie Brenston on the record label, but it was actually by Ike Turner and his band. In 1991, after a great deal of debate, the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame recognised it as the first rock 'n' roll song ever recorded. Turner was in jail at the time for cocaine possession, so his daughter accepted the award.

UPSIDE DOWN
THE JESUS AND MARY CHAIN (1984)
CREATION £20
JAMC's thrilling debut 45 *Upside Down* on Creation was a game-changer in the world of indie, fusing waves of cochlear-crushing feedback with Phil Spectorish girl-group melody. It paved the way for pop and noise to coexist and was a pivotal influence on celebrated shoegaze bands such as My Bloody Valentine.

HONG KONG GARDEN

SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES (1978)

POLYDOR £30 (WITH GATEFOLD SLEEVE)

While the band's punk credentials were unimpeachable – they sat on the sofa during the Grundy show – the music they created quickly outstripped the genre. Released in August 1978, *Hong Kong Garden* was a sublime slice of 7" vinyl.

NEW ROSE

THE DAMNED (1976)

STIFF £40

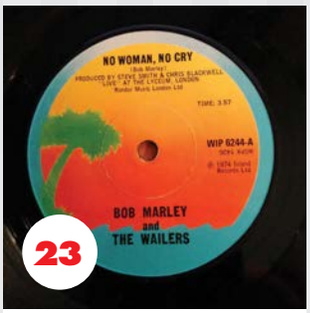
The Damned may have been the jokers in punk's pack, but they got their ragged arses in gear to release the genre's first 45. Hitting the shops in October 1976, *New Rose* is a gobsmacking ball of manic energy thrust forward by Rat Scabies' banging drums and Brian James' scratchy guitar.

STARMAN

DAVID BOWIE (1972)

RCA £60 (WITH PICTURE SLEEVE)

At the behest of his record-label bosses, Bowie's *Starman* was a last-minute addition to the *Ziggy Stardust* album. An androgynously provocative performance on Top Of The Pops to promote the 45 not only led to Bowie's commercial breakthrough, but went a long way towards blurring the lines between what was weird and what was normal.



NO WOMAN NO CRY

BOB MARLEY AND THE WAILERS (1975)

ISLAND £5

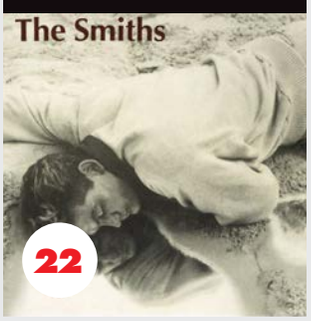
1975 was the year the UK mainstream was finally ready for reggae, and its global ambassador was Bob Marley. This breakthrough 45 was taken from that year's *Live! At The Lyceum*. Marley gave the songwriting credits to Vincent Ford, a friend who ran a soup kitchen in Trench Town.

THIS CHARMING MAN

THE SMITHS (1983)

ROUGH TRADE £15

Manchester's Morrissey and Marr reclaimed guitar pop in the 80s and, with its chiming guitar and witty wordsmithery, their second single set the stylistic template for a new generation of indie bands. Tales of jumped-up pantry boys on hillsides desolate had rarely sounded so appealing.



WHAT'D I SAY

RAY CHARLES WITH HIS ORCHESTRA (1959)

LONDON £25

One of soul's earliest milestone 45s, the wildly influential *What'd I Say* was improvised live onstage by Charles and his backing singers, The Raelettes. The call-and-response style was inspired by the church music that Brother Ray was brought up on, but the "sweet sounds of love", as he put it, certainly were not.

(WE'RE GONNA) ROCK AROUND THE CLOCK

BILL HALEY AND HIS COMETS (1955)

BRUNSWICK £9

Rock 'n' roll's avuncular founder Bill Haley's fusion of country and R&B whipped the youngsters up into a state of frenzied excitement on both sides of the pond. *(We're Gonna) Rock Around The Clock* was a ground-zero single that ushered in a new music-industry era.

AUTOBAHN

KRAFTWERK (1974)

VERTIGO £6

The 22-minute repetitive synthscape of Kraftwerk's fourth album was edited down to a radio-friendly three minutes or so. The Dusseldorfians' paean to Germany's motorways unexpectedly became not only a hit on both sides of the Atlantic, but also a highly influential touchstone in the way electronic music was to develop.

MAYBELLENE

CHUCK BERRY (1955)

CHESS £8

The pioneering Chuck Berry started playing his own idiosyncratic brand of country music for black audiences and ended up inventing rock 'n' roll. Obviously, it's not quite as simple as that, but his debut single for Chess – a song, fittingly enough, about cars and girls – was a portentous slice of everything to come.

THE MESSAGE

GRANDMASTER FLASH AND THE FURIOUS FIVE (1982)

SUGAR HILL £5

The early hip-hop 45s were nothing more than party tunes full of self-congratulatory boasting, but *The Message*'s blossoming brand of social commentary opened up fresh vistas.

THE FAT MAN

FATS DOMINO (1950)

IMPERIAL £50

The Second World War was not long over when New Orleans native Antoine 'Fats' Domino was committing his own embryonic version of rock 'n' roll to vinyl. Years before the phrase had even been coined, his stripped-down boogie-woogie piano and smutty lyrics blazed a trail for others to follow. *The Fat Man* was released the same year the 45 format appeared.

ROCK ISLAND LINE

THE LONNIE DONEGAN SKIFFLE GROUP (1955)

DECCA £8

Lonnie Donegan's unfeasibly rapid, almost punk, version of the traditional American folk song played a big part in triggering the skiffle craze in the UK. Following its release, legions of would-be rockstars picked up DIY guitars: including a young John Lennon and even younger Jimmy Page.

RESPECT

ARETHA FRANKLIN (1967)

ATLANTIC £10

The Queen Of Soul perfectly rearranged Otis Redding's 1965 hit single and reappropriated it, turning it into a powerful feminist anthem with a global message. Recorded with her sisters Erma and Carolyn on backing vocals, Aretha's version added the "R-E-S-P-E-C-T" chorus and the fantastic "sock it to me" refrain.

YOU REALLY GOT ME

THE KINKS (1964)

PYE £10

On The Kinks' breakthrough hit, it was mad axeman Dave who nipped briefly out of his elder brother's shadow to lay down one of rock's most influential riffs. His distorted solo was the heaviest yet witnessed on a UK 45, and lays claim to being a forerunner of the heavy-metal scene that was lurking around the corner.

The UK's Top 10 most expensive 7" singles

The Beatles and the Pistols may dominate this chart, but there are some more obscure titles among Discogs' list of the most expensive singles by UK artists

Most of us record hunters dream of discovering the dusty gold of ultra-rare 7" singles that can be picked up for a snip and then sell on for a small fortune – and as we all know, this small fortune will then be reinvested in more vinyl. Discogs has once again furnished us with a list: this time of the most expensive UK 7" singles to be sold on the site. Be warned, though, collecting this lot really will set you back a bob or two…

1 £11,250 Love Me Do

The Beatles

Parlophone 45-R 4949

This Parlophone demonstration (promo) 7" for The Beatles' *Love Me Do* is the most expensive single ever sold on Discogs. One of only 250 in existence, complete with 'McArtney' typo, it was purchased for a cool £11,250.

2 £10,110 God Save The Queen

Sex Pistols

A&M

A copy of the Sex Pistols' unreleased *God Save The Queen* A&M 7" sold for £10,110. Only nine are thought to exist after the label destroyed the band's recording contract six days after they signed it. Genuine originals have the serrated anti-slip necklace and 7284 written twice on the B-side runout groove.

3 £2,500 Anarchy In The UK

Sex Pistols

EMI 2566

With the band being dropped by EMI within the first few weeks of its official release, the original version of the Sex Pistols' raucous debut is rare enough (£120 with all-black picture sleeve); a white-label test pressing is something else altogether.

4 £2,385 Hand In Glove

The Smiths

Rough Trade RT131

There are said to have been only 25 copies of this ultra-scarce pressing of The Smiths' debut single in existence, so the sun truly does shine out of your behind if you've got one. Think you may be in luck? The sleeve is a misprinted negative version of the final sleeve image.

5 £2,350 Baby Your Phrasing Is Bad

Caleb

Philips BF1588

Caleb Quaye, older sibling of Finlay, played with Elton John as a member of Long John Baldry's backing band, Bluesology. He cut a single with Philips in 1967 (a limited pressing of 300-500) which now goes for in excess of a couple of grand.

6 £2,250 King Of Fuh

Brute Force

Apple Records APPLE 8

Stephen Friedland wrote and performed with The Tokens in the 1960s and took to recording under the name of Brute Force. John Lennon was highly amused by the sweary pun of the title and 100 copies were pressed on Apple. Unsurprisingly, though, radio play was not exactly forthcoming.

7 £2,225 An Ideal For Living

Joy Division

Enigma PSS139

The four young men called Warsaw went into a studio and came out as Joy Division. There were only 1,000 copies of this seminal 7" EP first pressed on the band's own label. There are plenty of counterfeit editions out there, so buyers beware.

8 £1,500 Traffic Lights

Anti-Social

Dynamite Records DRO-1

Anti-Social laid claim to being the world's most violent band and offered £15,000 to anybody who agreed to be executed onstage (which was very much against health-and-safety regs at the time). *Traffic Lights* is the Brummie punk outfit's only 45. It's also exceedingly rare.

9 £1,500 Happy Ogan

Soul Vendors

Studio 1 SO 2044

Coupled with *Soulful Music* by The Invaders, this rare rocksteady 7" from Studio 1 came at a price. The actual title of the track is *Happy Organ* and is a cover version of the Dave 'Baby' Cortez song featuring the legendary Jackie Mittoo (tearing it up on electric ogan).

10 £1,500 Rubber Band

David Bowie

Decca

David Bowie's early 'music hall' albums were issued on Deram, a subsidiary of Decca Records. Yet an unreleased demo version of the *Rubber Band* single, coupled with the song *London Boys*, made a brief appearance on the parent label, and is therefore hugely valuable.

What is the future of the format?

We asked a number of industry insiders a couple of questions about what lies ahead for the 7" single format:

1. DOES THE 7" SINGLE HAVE A FUTURE?

2. WHAT IS THE GREATEST 7" SINGLE OF ALL TIME?

Yes, in the right context. For the appropriate moments, there remain solid opportunities, such as Record Store Day, and exhibition or one-off exclusives. For specialists who can make profitable small runs of collectable tracks, there is a business.

I'm going to pick two: the feelgood perfection of George McCrae's *Rock Your Baby* and Joy Division's *Transmission* – a perfect record.
Tim Fraser-Harding, President, Global Catalogue, Recorded Music, Warner Music Group

It's noticeable over the last few years that we get offered fewer and fewer 7" singles on the new-release order forms each week. When I was a kid buying records for the first time, it was 7" singles I started with. It had to be an amazing album for me to shell out that amount of cash, and so singles were very important. I've spoken to record company reps about this and they say it's not viable financially, apart from select releases. The one thing I do know for sure is that we sell a lot of second-hand 7" singles every day; and that's a message from customers that they really like this format. Maybe the record companies are missing a trick?

It's got to be *New Rose* by The Damned. Angry. Simple. Fast. Short. Totally brilliant and a great pic sleeve.
Tony Boothroyd, Vinyl Tap

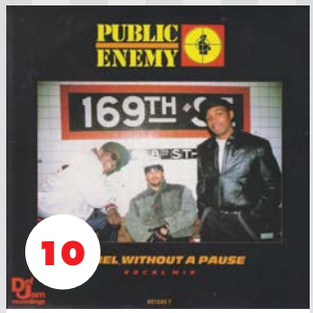
Without doubt they have a future. Their novelty diminishes somewhat when they're getting close to £10 to buy, though. They'd definitely be in better health if they were more throwaway.

Pagan Muzak by NON. A 7" housed in a 12" sleeve, with 17 locked grooves of noise and two centre holes. As 'stuffedspacepig' on Discogs said: "*Pagan Muzak* is more than a mere record, it's 'a pivotal moment in human evolution'."
Rich Walker, Strategic Director at Beggars Group/4AD

Absolutely. While the 7" may not be the go-to for major pop releases anymore, the format still epitomises the DIY spirit of independent music. It has also come back into favour among DJs, with reissue labels like Mr Bongo and BBE running 7" series covering everything from Brazilian boogie to classic house.

Sun Ra released his share of otherworldly missives, but none as surreal as ostensibly his most mundane. Among the first known El Saturn releases, *It's Christmas Time* features Ra on harmonium, accompanying unnamed Chicago vocal group The Qualities for an acid-laced festive jingle that sounds both familiar and uncannily other. That the original 7" is practically unobtainable only heightens the suspicion that its existence might be more myth than reality.
Anton Spice, Vinyl Factory

The 7" does have a future, but purely as a collectable item (sadly). I guess 7"s were used as an intro to an artist, or record – a taste of what you could expect, and at an affordable price. With the internet, you can find out in micro detail about every artist before



REBEL WITHOUT A PAUSE

PUBLIC ENEMY (1987)

DEF JAM £8

Rebel Without A Pause was the first single lifted off the *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back* album. Faster beats, a screaming horn loop and textures aplenty created an intense sample-delic wall of noise that was further into people's faces than ever before: a powerful mix of innovation and aggression.

I FEEL LOVE

DONNA SUMMER (1977)

GTO £5

A spectacularly influential 45, electronic dance music began with producer Giorgio Moroder's seductive collaboration with breathy disco queen Donna Summer. According to legend, Brian Eno excitedly played the record to David Bowie at Hansa Studios in Berlin, and promptly declared: "I have heard the sound of the future." He wasn't wrong.

MR. TAMBOURINE MAN

THE BYRDS (1965)

£8

The Byrds upped the jingle-jangle factor on their electric cover of Dylan's *Mr. Tambourine Man* and established the folk-rock genre. Their version so impressed the songwriter, he said: "You can even dance to that!"

7

SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

NIRVANA (1991)

GEFFEN £10

An obvious but unavoidable entry, almost overnight *Smells Like Teen Spirit* transformed 80s outsider rock into the mainstream music of the 90s. Rock had a new godhead, in the shape of Kurt Cobain, with swinging Seattle its epicentre. The song itself owed a lot to the Pixies and Boston's *More Than A Feeling*.

PAPA'S GOT A BRAND NEW BAG

JAMES BROWN AND THE FAMOUS FLAMES (1965)

LONDON £20

This marks the emergence of The Godfather Of Soul's signature sound and is one of the first funk records to make an indentation on the charts. Brown's heavy use of percussive rhythm changed the direction of R&B – and led to some pretty nifty dance moves while he was at it.

6

5

LIKE A ROLLING STONE

BOB DYLAN (1965)

CBS £10

Clocking in at six minutes, Bob Dylan's monumental single was like no other 45 that came before it. With its densely expressionistic lyrics and bluesy barroom groove, it was a work of high art and the very antithesis of ephemeral pop. As Bruce Springsteen said: "It sounded like somebody had kicked open the door to your mind."

THAT'S ALRIGHT

ELVIS PRESLEY (1954)

SUN £200

The King's first single hit the record shops in Memphis on 19 July 1954 and its iconic aftershock is still felt today. His hillbilly version of the Arthur Crudup song was fresh, exciting, sexy and was the music post-war youth had been waiting for. Elvis was still a teenager when he first got behind the mic at Sun Studios – he was about to redefine popular music.

4

3

I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND

THE BEATLES (1964)

PARLOPHONE £20

The first Beatles 45 to be recorded on new fangled four-track equipment, *I Want To Hold Your Hand* signified a spike in the sophistication of Lennon and McCartney as songwriters.

they've even released anything. 7" records are on average £6 to £9 each, with an album £16 to £22. You get so much more for your money with an LP. With the rise of the vinyl-only DJ, we do see people picking up 45s to play out, but it's got to be a banger.

My favourite ever 7" is the first one I ever purchased, that I still have… Okay, ready? Paul McCartney And The Frog Chorus's *We All Stand Together*. I liked Rupert The Bear. I have the picture disc, and it's quite collectable now.

Steve Courtnell, Pie And Vinyl

Yes, the 7" single does have a future. Whether it's in the jukebox of your mind or on the turntable of your record player or in the DJ booth at a backroom in a pub. It's explosive, concise and contains the very essence of rock 'n' roll. From *Rave On* by Buddy Holly, through *Paperback Writer* by The Beatles, through *Hand In Glove* by The Smiths, through *Gangsters* by The Specials to the present day. It is pure nuclear fission in a piece of plastic.

The greatest 7" ever is *Brown Eyed Girl* by Van Morrison. It contains all your youth, all the sexual longing of your youth, all the rebellion of skipping off from your daily routine. It has the best opening riff and the best vocalist in rock 'n' roll at his richest, entrancing us with those Belfast vowels.

Geoff Travis, Rough Trade Founder

BE MY BABY

THE RONETTES (1963)

LONDON £10

Clearly unhinged, but undeniably a genius, Phil Spector was one of the first producers to realise a recording studio could be an instrument in itself. The 'Wall Of Sound' he created with his wife/muse Ronnie has held a huge sway over pop music ever since. Brian Wilson believes *Be My Baby* to be the greatest 45 ever made.

2

1

GOOD VIBRATIONS

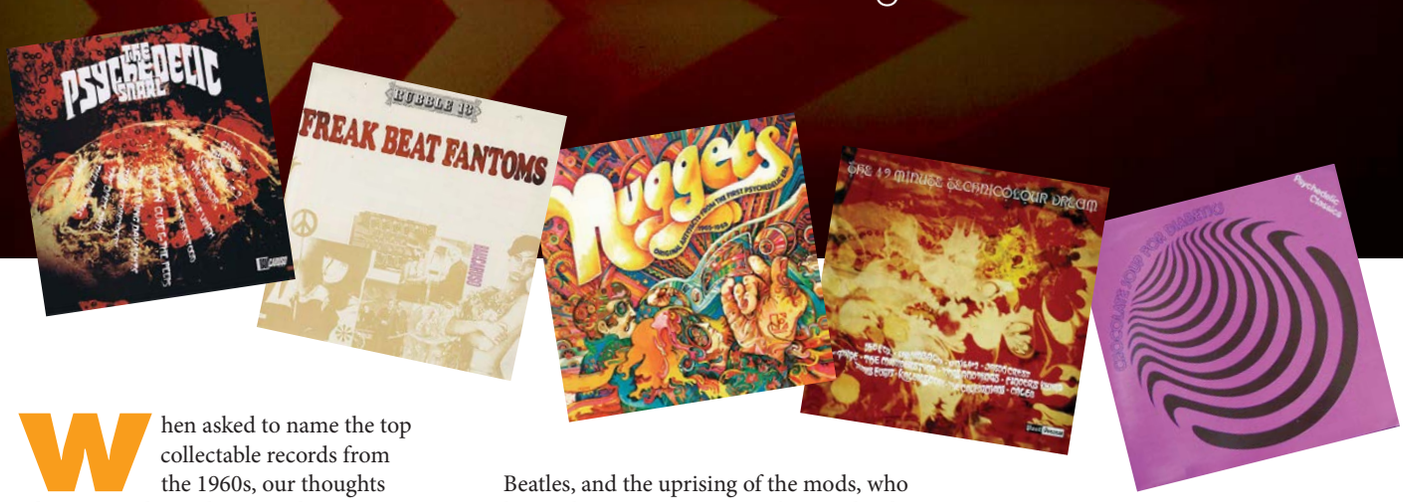
THE BEACH BOYS (1966)

CAPITOL £10

It may have cost a pretty bundle to record, but Brian Wilson's sunshine symphony sanctioned a new wave of musical experimentation and also triggered the onset of both psychedelic pop and, to a degree, progressive rock. It also helped define the recording studio as the place where creative heights could be scaled outside of the live arena. ●

FREAK OUT!

It was a 1960s scene that wasn't given a name until two decades later, but 'freakbeat' curios are now changing hands for over £200. **John Pickford** gets his freak on…



When asked to name the top collectable records from the 1960s, our thoughts often turn to big-ticket items by The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Who, along with early releases from artists such as David Bowie and Pink Floyd. Some of the most sought-after 60s records, however, are obscure 45s from the genre known by collectors as 'freakbeat'.

If you've never heard the term before, you're in good company; neither had any of the groups that made the records. There were no bands in the 1960s that identified as freakbeat. That's because the term wasn't coined until the 1980s, when collector Phil Smee invented it to describe many of the tracks featured on his *Rubble* series of 1960s compilations.

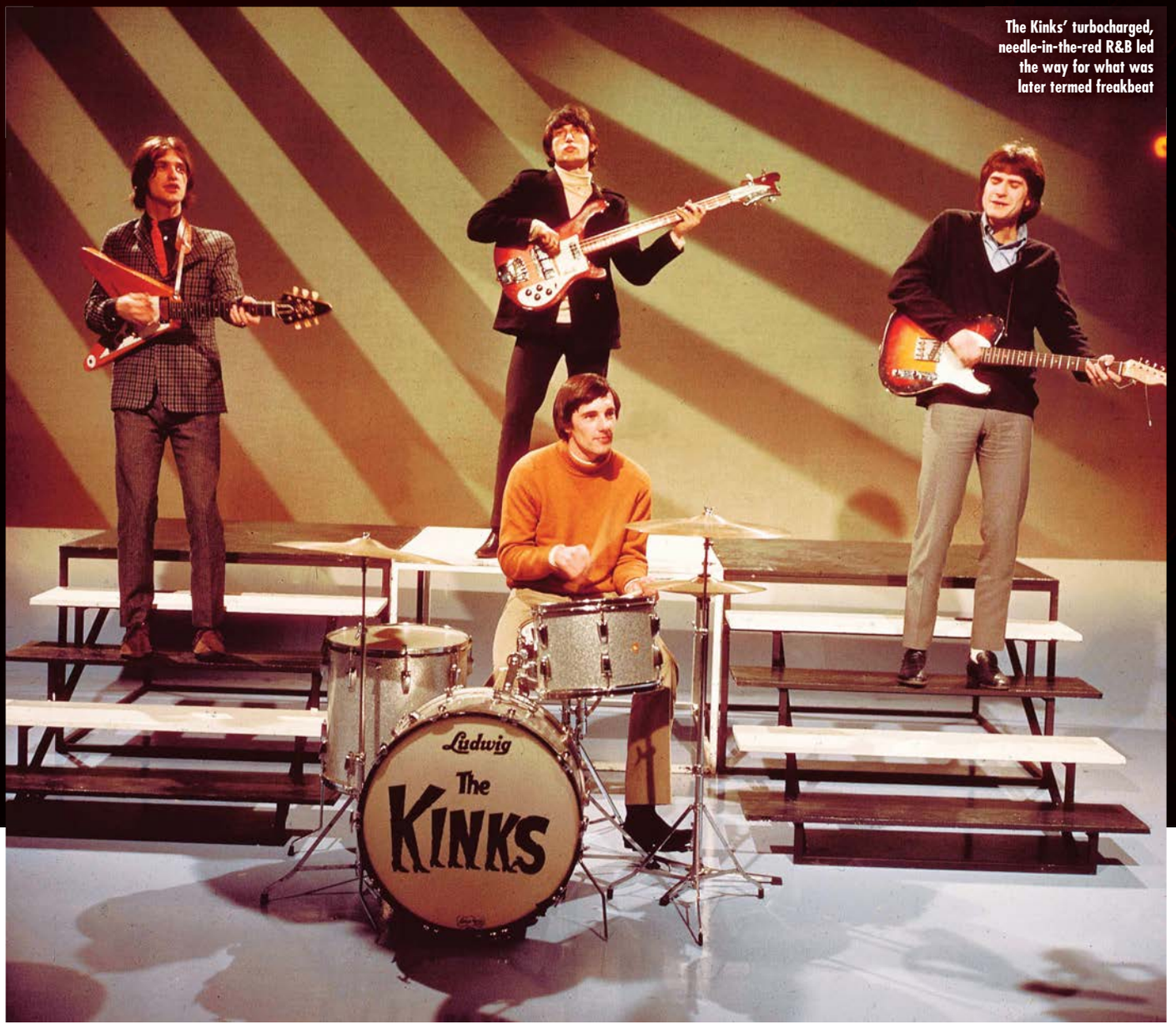
As the name implies, freakbeat takes 1960s beat music and infuses it with a wild, freakish sound way beyond the norms of the standard beat group. The roots of freakbeat can be traced back to both the Beat Boom of 1963, led by The Beatles, and the uprising of the mods, who listened to American R&B. Thousands of groups formed in the wake of The Beatles' unprecedented success. However, by the end of 1963, the Merseybeat boom had run its course, and R&B became the latest trend to be adopted by guitar-based bands. Most of the groups now classed as freakbeat thought of themselves simply as R&B outfits.

WROUGHT BY THE FUZZ

By 1964, bands such as The Rolling Stones and The Kinks were offering a tougher, wilder sound than the pure-pop style of groups such as The Hollies and The Searchers. Dave Davies' speaker-shredding guitar antics on The Kinks' 1964 hits *You Really Got Me* and *All Day And All Of The Night* inspired a generation of guitarists to crank up their amplifiers to get an overdriven, distorted sound.

An important factor in the creation of the freakbeat sound was the invention of the fuzzbox, the effects pedal guitarists have relied upon ever since for warping normal electric-guitar tones into an angry sonic assault. Many freakbeat records feature this wasp-in-a-blender guitar sound, which came to prominence when Keith Richard (he didn't add the 's' to his surname until a few years later) used a Maestro fuzzbox for the riff on The Stones' 1965 transatlantic chart-topper *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction*. Around the same time, The Who's Pete Townshend defined their early sound by using howling feedback to great effect on tracks such as *Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere* and *My Generation*.

The Yardbirds, during their period with Jeff Beck on lead guitar, pioneered some of the more outrageous guitar pyrotechnics adopted by copyists, while the snarling attitude present in many freakbeat tracks can be attributed to The Pretty Things, who



The Kinks' turbocharged, needle-in-the-red R&B led the way for what was later termed freakbeat

Getty

were considered to be even more raucous and outlandish than the Stones.

While a handful of bands scored hits with this new aggressive sound, hundreds of others tried their luck without success. Some groups beloved of freakbeat aficionados such as The Creation, The Sorrows, The Eyes and The Birds (who featured future Faces and Stones guitarist Ronnie Wood) did well enough to issue several classic 45s with some minor chart success. However, most freakbeat groups remained obscure, releasing a single 45 or two if they were lucky.

Many of these records were much fiercer than the sounds created by the hit-making groups, and it's not surprising that they were far too wild for the pop charts of the mid 60s. As a result, the records sold extremely poorly. In some cases, the promo or demo discs handed out to reviewers and DJs are more common than the records released for sale to the public.

WHILE SOME HAD MINOR CHART SUCCESS, MOST FREAKBEAT GROUPS REMAINED OBSCURE, RELEASING A SINGLE 45 OR TWO IF THEY WERE LUCKY

GARAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

While the term freakbeat is usually used to describe British records and other fuzz-drenched gems from around the world, its American equivalent is garage rock, epitomised by bands such as The Seeds, The Standells, Count Five and The Shadows Of Knight, all of whom managed to score US hits in the mid 60s. The 1972 release of Lenny Kaye's excellent *Nuggets* compilation, featuring these and other US garage bands, did much to kickstart an interest in the grittier end of 1960s guitar pop. This, in turn, inspired the *Pebbles* series, which featured genuine American obscurities ranging from the inspired to the hopeless.

The first compilations featuring UK freakbeat appeared around 1980, however the original release of the *Chocolate Soup For Diabetics* series was hampered by poor sound quality. With compressed and tinny ▶

sound, some of the tracks had even been speeded up! Phil Smee's superb *Rubble* compilations – *The Psychedelic Snarl* and *49 Minute Technicolour Dream* to name but two – appeared in the mid 1980s and mixed freakbeat with psychedelia and other late-60s obscurities.

This trend has continued, and while there are some great compilations devoted to freakbeat, many more adopt a more general mid-to-late-60s curios theme. It's quite common to find enthusiasts of UK psych who also like a bit of freakbeat, and vice versa.

FREAKS INHERIT THE EARTH

Nowadays, there is much debate among collectors as to which records are actually freakbeat, with some including rather pedestrian R&B records as supposedly legitimate examples of the genre; while some sellers on internet auction sites use the word to help gain interest in the tamest of 60s obscurities. Although the tag can divide opinion, most agree that the very best freakbeat records transcend the generic 12-bar, three-chord style prevalent in many standard R&B 45s.

Collecting original freakbeat – all on 45rpm 7" singles (these non-hit groups rarely got to cut an album) is now an expensive hobby. Three decades ago, these records often sold at record fairs for £10, when a mint-condition Rolling Stones single cost £3. Nowadays, Stones 7"s will be £5 to £10, while a decent freakbeat 45 will set you back at least £200. Luckily, most have reappeared on compilations such as the aforementioned *Rubble* series, which can be bought for more affordable sums, and are an excellent way to discover some of the most exciting records ever released. ●

THREE DECADES AGO, THESE RECORDS SOLD AT RECORD FAIRS FOR £10... NOW, A DECENT FREAKBEAT 45 WILL SET YOU BACK AT LEAST £200

THE SYNDICATS

CRAWDADDY SIMONE

COLUMBIA DB7686
(SEPT 1965)

Featuring one of the loudest and wildest guitar solos committed to vinyl, *Crawdaddy Simone* was the B-side to their cover of Ben E. King's *On The Horizon*. The last of three Syndicats singles produced by the maverick recording pioneer Joe Meek, the outrageous guitar solo was played by Ray Fenwick, who later joined the Spencer Davis Group.

£800

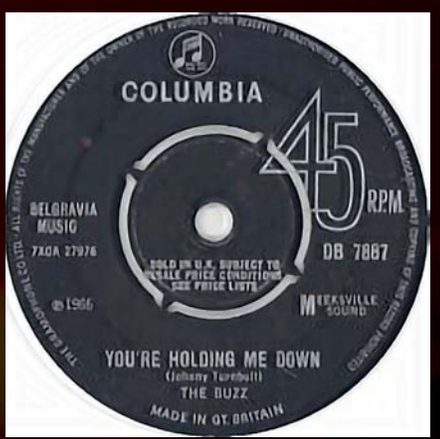
BIRDS BIRDS

SAY THOSE MAGIC WORDS

REACTION 591005
(SEPT 1966)

Following two superb Decca 45s released in 1965 under the name The Birds (which they altered to avoid confusion with the chart-topping Byrds), the group released this raucous cover of The McCoys' US non-hit in the autumn of 1966. Released on the recently launched Reaction label, the band featured future member of the Faces and the Stones, Ronnie Wood.

£750



THE BUZZ

YOU'RE HOLDING ME DOWN

COLUMBIA DB 7887
(APRIL 1966)

A blistering Meeksville Sound production, this track perhaps more than any other epitomises the classic freakbeat sound, with distorted fuzz guitar accentuating a vicious vocal performance before a lengthy, cacophonic fade-out finds singer Tam White screaming into Joe Meek's homemade spring reverb box. A near-mint 'archive copy' recently sold on eBay for a staggering £837.

£400

CRAIG

I MUST BE MAD

FONTANA TF 715
(JUNE 1966

Pounding drums, courtesy of future ELP sticksman Carl Palmer, and heavily echoed guitar riffing puts this in the upper echelons of freakbeat. Released around the same time as Wimple Winch's *Save My Soul*, also on Fontana, 1966 was undoubtedly the greatest and most prolific year for the genre.

£300

ALLEN POUND'S GET RICH

SEARCHIN' IN THE WILDERNESS

PARLOPHONE R5532

(NOV 1966)

Hailing from Bradford, the only release from this group resides at the heavier end of freakbeat. Tribal drums and a super-fuzzed Duane Eddy-style guitar riff make this a distorted monster of a record. Utterly obscure and rare as hen's teeth, this was the group's only release.

£750

WIMPLE WINCH

SAVE MY SOUL

FONTANA TF 718

(JUNE 1966)

The second of three magnificent 45s from Stockport's finest, the track begins with a menacing guitar-and-bass riff accompanied by a tight drum groove before exploding into an intense, driving chorus with singer Dee Christopholus hollering: "Get out of my way you – you ain't no good!"

£500

THE FLEUR DE LYS

CIRCLES

IMMEDIATE IM32

(MARCH 1966)

Released on Andrew Oldham's hip Immediate label and produced by Glyn Johns (who later worked with The Beatles, Stones and Led Zeppelin), this dynamic cover of the Pete Townshend song outclasses both of The Who's versions (one produced by Shel Talmy, the other by the group) in the freakbeat stakes. An equally brilliant follow-up, *Mud In Your Eye*, appeared on Polydor in November 1966.

£400

THE ANSWERS

IT'S JUST A FEAR

COLUMBIA DB 7847

(FEBRUARY 1966)

A searing guitar break and howling vocals elevate this track from being just another mid-60s pop-beater. The better of their two 45s, a memorable tune and inventive bridge section puts this at the lighter, pop-based end of freakbeat. Guitarist Tony Hill went on to join The Misunderstood, another fine freakbeat group who were championed by John Peel.

£250

THE VOICE

THE TRAIN TO DISASTER

MERCURY MF 905

(APRIL 1966)

A one-off single from this London-based group contains a message of impending doom for the world. Heavily distorted guitar and organ create a wall of noise to force home the grim subject matter. Guitarist Miller Anderson later became a player on the blues-rock scene and was briefly replaced in this band by future Bowie collaborator Mick Ronson.

£250

DAVID JOHN AND THE MOOD

DIGGIN' FOR GOLD

PARLOPHONE R 5301

(JULY 1965)

Once erroneously thought to feature a young David Bowie, this was the group's third and final release. Like their previous 45, a cover of Bo Diddley's *Bring It To Jerome*, this was a product of Joe Meek's home-built studio and features an instrumental break performed on a piano that Meek had modified by putting drawing pins into the hammers.

£220

THE ESSENTIAL

The Clash

The Clash's brief and unlikely trajectory from the crucible of punk to mainstream burnout spawned a range of curious collectibles. **Sean Egan** digs out the rarities…

The Clash were never supposed to be about anything as precious or retrograde as collectability.

Punk being a musical movement that toppled idols and railed against rock-aristocracy materialism and avarice, it initially seemed unthinkable that anyone might one day covet the genre's releases for rarity value. Punk's primitivism and its affected disposability also helped to bolster that presumption.

Excellence, however, creates an impetus to cherish. The Clash might have declared on the flipside of their debut single: "No Elvis, Beatles or The Rolling Stones in 1977," but the quality of the output of the London four-piece soon catapulted them into the very musical pantheon they sought to question. As their success mushroomed and their fans multiplied, the more obscure items from their back catalogue inevitably assumed the status of buried treasure.

In truth, the process started early. In early '77, The Clash authorised the giveaway of an EP of original material in a promotional deal with the *NME*. Their motivation was almost certainly to bolster their men-of-the-people image, but the move instantly backfired. With the 'Capital Radio' EP limited to 10,000 copies, it soon meant that a chunk of the band's growing army of fans were prepared to pay large sums of money for it.

The Clash had a relatively short life. Their recording career from their March 1977 debut record lasted around five years; eight if one includes the much-ridiculed post-Mick Jones line-up. They were, though, famously productive, releasing six albums (one of which was a double, another a triple), plus many standalone singles and exclusive B-sides. Within that catalogue were numerous covetable rarities, alternates and variations, as well as – in their latter, money-oriented days – gimmicky giveaways. So, in no particular order, we present something the band of 40 years ago would have considered a contradiction in terms: a list of Clash collector's items.

40 THE CLASH – 5 STUDIO ALBUM LP SET (COLUMBIA 2013)

Since *Sound System*, the massive, 12-disc Clash release of 2013, was offered only via CD and download, this eight-disc release is the closest vinyl fans can get to such a comprehensive Clash overview. All pre-*Cut The Crap* albums are presented as replicas of the vinyl originals, but the sound is different – *Sandinista!* in particular is improved by the Jones-supervised remastering.

Rarest 2013 Columbia **£120**

39 FROM HERE TO ETERNITY: LIVE (COLUMBIA 1999)

The Clash were great live: from 1980 to 1982, their burnished, elegant concert music was superior to their records. Their first live album, though, was posthumous and underwhelming, ignoring live recordings from 1976, 1977 and 1979 in favour of merely adequate performances. For those interested in such things, an exclusive *Blitzkrieg Bop/Police & Thieves* live medley formed a hidden track on *Rockers Galore*, a 1999 promo CD.

Rarest 1999 Columbia **£60**

35 RETURN TO BRIXTON/GUNS OF BRIXTON
(CBS 1990)

The finale of Side Two of *London Calling* was Paul Simonon's first composition and vocal performance. A menacing reggae track, it's like a scenario from *The Harder They Come* transplanted to SW2. In 1990, Beats International made the top spot in the UK with *Dub Be Good To Me*, which blatantly lifted *Guns Of Brixton*'s compelling bassline. The Clash responded with a new mix.

Rarest 1990 CBS **£18**

36 CUT THE CRAP
(EPIC 1985)

For this sixth and final album, Bernard Rhodes acted as producer and co-writer on a bizarre record dominated by drum machines, synthesisers and unsubtle mass chanting. A disgusted Strummer refused to promote an album which, when Jones turned down his entreaties to get the old gang back together, ended up being a sad finale for a once-great band. So ill-thought-of is the LP that it has never been reissued on vinyl.

Rarest 1985 CBS (Portugal) **£17.50**

34 HOUSE OF THE JU-JU QUEEN/SEX MACHINE
(BIG BEAT RECORDS 1983)

The Clash repaid the favour of taking Janie Jones' name for one of their best songs with this single credited to her and 'The Lash'. It features the playing of Strummer, Jones and Simonon, with Joe producing and writing the A-side. Janie Jones was actually a minor pop star before branching out into the sex trade, so doesn't acquit herself too badly on a number that alleges hypocrisy on the part of the legal establishment that prosecuted her.

Rarest 1983 Big Beat **£11**

37 FINGERPOPPIN' (AOR RE-MIX)
(EPIC 1985)

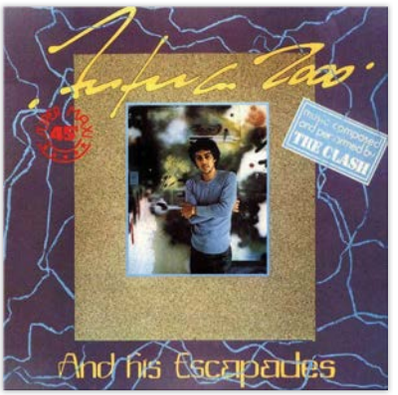
One of the most curious of all Clash discs. With no band to promote *Cut The Crap*, Epic commissioned Jason Corsaro to extend and dancify one of its tracks for this 12" 33rpm promo single with identical sides. As the song epitomised *Cut The Crap*'s faults – incongruous Americanisms and a 33-year-old jive talkin' like an adolescent – it was always unlikely to recreate the success of its predecessor.

Rarest 1985 Epic (US) **£8**

33 THIS IS ENGLAND/ DO IT NOW/ SEX MAD ROAR
(CBS 1985)

The long wait for the first product of the new five-man Clash (Strummer and Simonon the only familiar members) sounded alarm bells, but *This Is England* did much to quell them. A stately paced, heart-wrenching examination of the casualties of Thatcherism, it was the final Clash classic. This 12" single tends to fetch higher prices than the 7", although both B-sides are mediocre.

Rarest 1985 CBS (Spain) **£15**



THE ESCAPADES OF FUTURA 2000
(CELLULOID 1982)

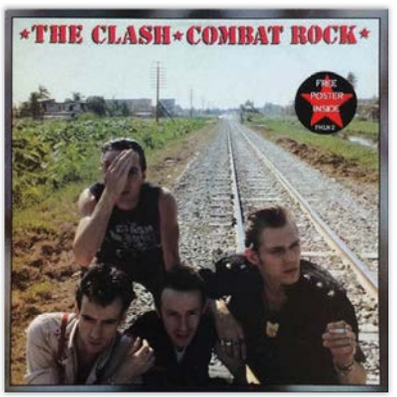
The Clash had a soft spot for anyone with a streetwise aura, an example being Futura 2000, one of the urban graffiti artists then just becoming media stars. He designed the *This Is Radio Clash* cover, handwrote the lyrics on *Combat Rock*'s inner sleeve and rapped on *Overpowered By Funk*. Both sides of this single were co-written by him and Mick Jones, with The Clash adding backing and production.

Rarest 1994 360° Records green-vinyl reissue (Germany) **£40**

32 SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO/ STRAIGHT TO HELL
(CBS 1982)

This original double-A-sided UK release downplayed *Should I Stay…* in favour of a strangely butchered version of *Combat Rock*'s harrowing highlight (*Straight To Hell* was even edited on the 12"). A rather jerky anthem of hesitation about walking out of a love affair, *Should I Stay…* seems to owe something to both Mitch Ryder & the Detroit Wheels' *Little Latin Lupe* Lu and *Sophistication* by Sharks.

Rarest 1982 CBS (Spain) **£55**



30 COMBAT ROCK
(CBS 1982)

Sick of the penury inflicted by underpriced double and triple sets, The Clash went back to a single disc for their fifth album. Although they didn't return to the excellence of their first three records, diligent marketing secured this bitty, peculiar LP over two million sales in the USA. First vinyl pressings are valued because they feature, as well as a later-altered poster, a cheery ad for a toilet cleaner overdubbed onto *Inoculated City*, later removed for legal reasons.

Rarest 1982 CBS **£21**

28 CONCERTS FOR THE PEOPLE OF KAMPUCHEA
(ATLANTIC 1981)

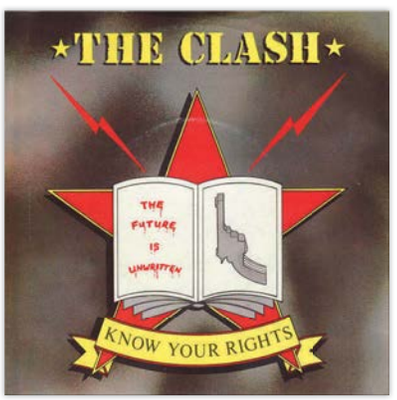
In December 1979, The Clash were part of a star-studded bill for a series of concerts at London's Hammersmith Odeon intended to raise money for the afflicted state of Kampuchea. A multi-artist double album featuring highlights was belatedly released in 1981. The Clash's contribution was a powerful performance of the Willie Williams/Jackie Mittoo reggae tune, *Armagideon Time*.

Rarest 1981 Atlantic (Spain) **£10.50**

31 ROCK THE CASBAH/ LONG TIME JERK
(EPIC 1982)

Heroin-addicted drummer Topper Headon was increasingly incapacitated during the *Combat Rock* sessions, but *Rock The Casbah* was the glorious exception. The piano, bass and drums are all Headon's work. The song's catchiness, and Strummer's droll lyric about the plight of rock lovers in fundamentalist Iran, propelled it into the US Top 10. The cut was given a Mick Jones remix with a far more prominent rhythm track.

Rarest 1982 Epic (Japan) **£16**



29 KNOW YOUR RIGHTS/ FIRST NIGHT BACK IN LONDON
(CBS 1982)

The sonic punch of this stripped-back, vice-tight track is not diluted too much by a lyric that comes over like a teenager's idea of social commentary. The exclusive B-side – a brooding story of maltreatment upon return from foreign travels – is also fine stuff. However, this first taste of *Combat Rock* marked the beginning of what some diehards felt was a true sellout… this release came with a free sticker.

Rarest 1982 CBS (Japan) **£21**

27 SPIRIT OF ST. LOUIS
(EPIC/SONY 1981)

This Ellen Foley album, recorded directly after the *Sandinista!* sessions, was an interesting digression in The Clash's career. Produced by Jones and featuring the playing of all four Clash members, it saw Strummer and Jones – who wrote six of the songs – taking the opportunity to experiment with their songwriting. The overwhelming tone is that of European theatrical pop merchants such as Jacques Brel, with tracks such as *The Death Of The Psychoanalyst Of Salvador Dalí*.

Rarest 1981 Epic (Canada) **£9**

26 THIS IS RADIO CLASH/RADIO CLASH
(CBS 1981)

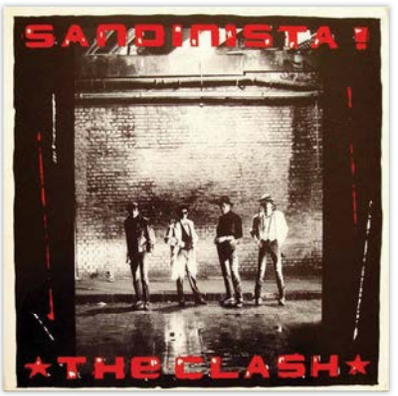
The final standalone Clash single, *This Is Radio Clash* features a half-decent stuttering funk groove and an occasionally witty lyric. Yet the band's self-absorption and the production are wearying. The B-side is the second half of an already over-long song. The 12" featured further versions of said song in the form of *Outside Broadcast* and *Radio 5*. It was all the type of hubris that was giving The Clash an air of the ridiculous.

Rarest 1981 CBS (Greece) **£20**

24 THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN/THE MAGNIFICENT DANCE
(CBS 1981)

The Clash's story might have been very different had this superb record been the lead-off *Sandinista!* 45. A nimble, infectious exploration of the tedium of nine-to-five life, it was the first white rap single (Blondie's *Rapture* was a close second). It may have had a major influence on the genre: it was a pioneering instance of rap social commentary, preceding records such as Grandmaster Flash's *The Message*.

Rarest 1980 CBS **£7**



22 SANDINISTA!
(CBS 1980)

At the time, it was beyond parody: punk figureheads releasing a triple LP. Were The Clash streetwise punks or self-indulgent prog-rockers? Worse, when the album did materialise, its UK poverty vistas seemed laughably presumptuous for what had now become a troupe of globetrotters. Musically, fully a third of it was worthless. Another third lacked bite. With hindsight, it's clear that within *Sandinista!* is a good double album and a great single LP.

Rarest 1980 CBS (Mexico) **£300**

25 THE MAGNIFICENT DANCE/THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN/THE CALL UP/THE COOL OUT
(CBS 1981)

This US 12" single actually appeared a month before *The Magnificent Seven* UK 7". Meanwhile, *The Cool Out* – a remix of *The Call Up* – didn't even appear in the UK. Also, they were treating the 12" remix as seriously as they did its dub cousin: *The Magnificent Dance* took precedence over the track it was remixed from.

Rarest 1981 Epic **£18**

23 HITSVILLE U.K./RADIO ONE
(EPIC 1980)

Considering The Clash agreed to forfeit royalties on the first 200,000 UK sales of *Sandinista!* to subsidise the low retail price they insisted on, they pushed the LP very clumsily. The second single – a tribute to UK indie labels that had successfully taken on the conglomerates – is a limpid piece of cod Motown with Ellen Foley's vocal given Ono-esque prominence. Plus, it's coupled with an artistically negligible Mikey Dread toast.

Rarest 1980 Epic (New Zealand) **£11.50**

21 THE CALL UP/STOP THE WORLD
(CBS 1980)

Although a first-rate record, *The Call Up* marked the point where British fans felt The Clash started to lose touch. The possibility of the return of the draft was not a UK concern, but relevant in America, where the band now spent much of their time (Jones was in a relationship with Missouri chanteuse Ellen Foley). The single marked the end (on Clash fare) of the 'Strummer/Jones' songwriting credit, with both tracks ascribed to 'Clash'.

Rarest 1980 Epic (New Zealand) **£30**

20

BLACK MARKET CLASH
(EPIC 1980)

This 10" album for the North American market grouped tracks from the debut album left off the US version. However, that it boasted previously unavailable material and rounded up recordings otherwise scattered across singles and EPs created a demand for import copies in the UK. *Bankrobber* and *Pressure Drop* were featured in new mixes and it included the unheard *Time Is Tight* and *Bankrobber* 'version' *Robber Dub*.

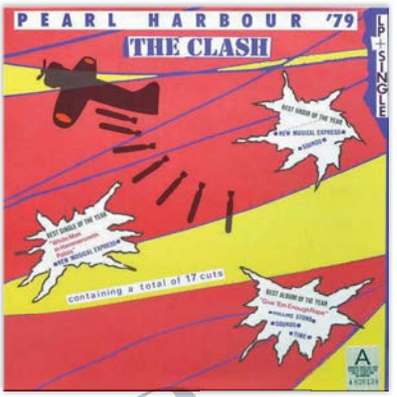
Rarest 1981 CBS (Spain) **£23**

18

TRAIN IN VAIN (STAND BY ME)/ LONDON CALLING
(EPIC 1980)

The temporary absence of sacked politically hard-line manager Bernard Rhodes freed The Clash to include love songs on *London Calling*. Strummer wrote *Spanish Bombs*, while Jones contributed *Train In Vain*. The latter's conventionality made Epic see it as the perfect follow-up to *I Fought The Law*, but it was also revolutionary, proving a love song in Estuary English didn't have to sound ridiculous.

Rarest 1979 Epic (Costa Rica) **£150**

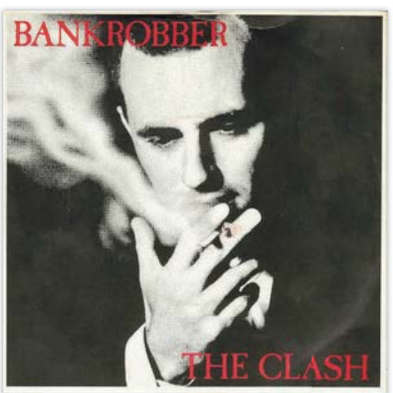


16

PEARL HARBOUR '79
(EPIC 1979)

A broadside against the then-bland Americana swamping British culture, *I'm So Bored With The U.S.A.* became a millstone, raised whenever The Clash spent long periods there. They tried undermining such criticisms by opening American sets with it and titling their first US outing the 'Pearl Harbour Tour'. This Japanese release is named after the latter, but undermines its point by replicating the traduced American version of the first LP, down to the same free single.

Rarest 1979 Epic (Japan) **£34**



19

BANKROBBER/ ROCKERS GALORE... UK TOUR
(EPIC 1980)

CBS initially refused to release this on the grounds that a standalone single wasn't appropriate when The Clash's latest LP hadn't yet been fully promoted. However, after a Dutch 33rpm release of *Train In Vain* with *Bankrobber* on the B-side started selling well on import, CBS backed down and it became a UK No. 12. The UK B-side has a Mikey Dread toast over the A-side backing track.

Rarest 1980 Epic (New Zealand) **£50**

17

ROCK AGAINST RACISM – RAR'S GREATEST HITS
(RARECORDS 1980)

The Clash contributed a version of *(White Man) In Hammersmith Palais* to this Various Artists collection designed to raise money for the titular pressure group. This studio outtake has a different lyric, with lines about US dollars replacing the reference to Burton suits (a clear Jam putdown). In territories outside the UK and Sweden, it was replaced by *The Winter Of '79* by the Tom Robinson Band.

Rarest 1980 Virgin **£7**

15

LONDON CALLING
(CBS 1979)

The plush production on this, The Clash's LP masterpiece, was mirrored by the splendid packaging: two discs housed in a single jacket with card inner sleeves adorned with lyrics and photos (copied by Bruce Springsteen pretty much wholesale for *The River*). The first pressing is the most collectible of the domestic versions, because Mick Jones' cockney soul-chug *Train In Vain*, added too late to feature in the tracklisting, was annotated only in the run-out groove.

Rarest 1979 CBS (Japan, gatefold) **£43**

14 LONDON CALLING/ ARMAGIDEON TIME
(CBS 1979)

The Clash never had a UK Top 10 single in their lifetime. This atmospheric tale of apocalypse made No. 11, but could have been a chart-topper if they'd allowed their wares on *Top Of The Pops*. Unlikely? The year's Christmas No. 1 was *Another Brick In The Wall (Part II)*. *London Calling* was the subject of the first Clash 12" single, with two dub versions of the smouldering reggae B-side.

Rarest 1979 CBS yellow vinyl 12" 45rpm (Colombia) **£175**

13 I FOUGHT THE LAW/ (WHITE MAN) IN HAMMERSMITH PALAIS
(EPIC 1979)

The Clash's *I Fought The Law* was galvanising stuff, but some British fans were disgusted: it was a cover, was steeped in Americana and was generalised rebellion rather than relevant social commentary. All these reasons are exactly why Epic put it on the A-side of the first American Clash single. It failed to crack the Top 40.

Rarest 1979 Epic (USA) **£10**

12 THE CLASH (US VERSION)
(EPIC 1979)

The Clash's stateside label agreed to release the band's debut album only after import copies of that supposedly unacceptably lo-fi product sold like hot cakes. For the US version, Epic jettisoned four tracks to make room for UK singles and B-sides, inserted *I Fought The Law*, shuffled the running order and threw in a free promo single containing two tracks from the new UK EP. Copies still containing the free single fetch the highest prices.

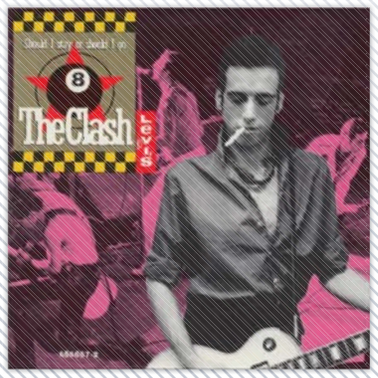
Rarest US Epic (blue cover, single) **£17**

THE SAGA OF *SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO*

Various releases of the Clash's most famous song

Its stiffness makes *Should I Stay Or Should I Go* an arguably inferior example of The Clash's anthemic rock, yet it became the best-known of all Clash songs. The UK single is covered in the main text; over in the States, while Epic were no doubt delighted to be able to market another non-political Clash song that wouldn't frighten the horses, they couldn't seem to make up their minds about its B-side. Perhaps the legal issues surrounding original flipside *Inoculated City* motivated the replacement of that 10 June 1982 release (Epic 14-03006). *Should I Stay Or Should I Go* b/w *Cool Confusion* (Epic 34-03547) was issued on 24 June (that disc's B-side was not released in the UK and has only appeared on compilations in a different mix).

By 20 July, Epic had put out a limited-edition version backed by *First Night Back In London* (Epic 14-03061). None of the three versions cracked the Billboard Top 40. All will cost around a fiver. By 1991, punk stances were history. The Clash sanctioned *Should I Stay*...'s use in a UK Levi's ad.



11 THE COST OF LIVING EP
(CBS 1979)

The *NME* giveaway barely qualified as an EP, but this release can have left few feeling disappointed, with four high-quality songs and witty, deluxe packaging. The EP – which opened with a cover of *I Fought The Law* – included *Capital Radio*, re-recorded because of fans complaining that they couldn't obtain the original. Silly-money prices continue to be fetched by the *NME* EP: an alternate version is just another object of desire.

Rarest 1979 CBS (UK promo) **£35**

10 ENGLISH CIVIL WAR (JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME)/ PRESSURE DROP

(CBS 1979)

The Clash released two singles from their second album without causing any of the fuss they had over *Remote Control*. In the strife-torn late 70s, there was much talk of civil war in Britain. This atmosphere clearly fed into *English Civil War*, an Anglicisation and hard-rock updating of American Civil War folk song *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*.

Rarest CBS (Germany) **£105**

9 TOMMY GUN/ 1-2 CRUSH ON YOU

(CBS 1978)

Its *Sturm und Drang* caused many to assume it to be irresponsible glorification of violence, but in fact, *Tommy Gun* is a repudiation of the terrorists' methods. An original B-side was an enticement to people who had bought the parent LP a fortnight before, but the Jones-sung *1-2, Crush On You* is a risible pre-punk throwback with dated American accents and banal romantic sentiments.

Rarest 1978 CBS (Ireland) **£17.50**

8 GIVE 'EM ENOUGH ROPE

(CBS 1978)

Some were disappointed by the overbearing thunder and glossy sheen of The Clash's second album. Others cite the powerhouse exploration of geopolitics, *Safe European Home*, and the friendship anthem *Stay Free* as proof that the band were worthy of the punk throne vacated by the fragmenting Sex Pistols. Original pressings came with a double-sided poster, The Clash Atlas.

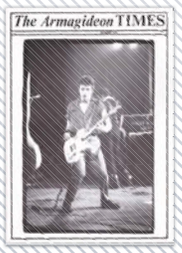
Rarest 1978 CBS UK (first pressing with Clash Atlas insert) **£300+**

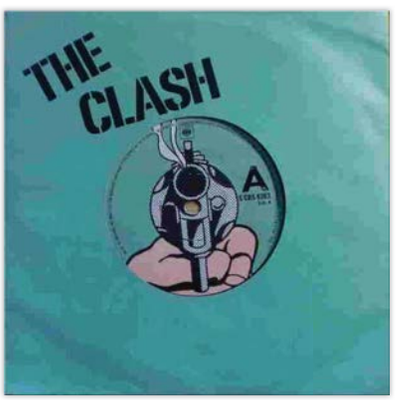
THE ARMAGIDEON TIMES LYRIC SHEET

The Clash's mock newspaper is now a rarity

The original *Sandinista!* LP came with a 12-inch-square lyric sheet, illustrated by cartoonist Steve Bell, which folded out to six pages.

The lyric sheet was designed as a mock newspaper and given the title 'The Armagideon Times'. Many purchasers of the album would've been puzzled by the 'No. 3' on its mock masthead. The two previous 'issues' of The Armagideon Times were tour programmes from the 16 Tons Tour of January to June 1980. The Clash decided to make the programmes resemble fanzines, adopting the haphazard layouts and hand-scrawled wording of the amateur magazines that had been so integral to the DIY ethos of the punk movement. They also decided to put out new editions of the programme as the tour progressed, although that idea was abandoned after two issues as part of the band's stand-off with CBS over their refusal to release *Bankrobber*. Reprints of the programmes were included in the *Sound System* boxset, along with a new 'special edition' of The Armagideon Times, featuring essays on the band by various luminaries. Needless to say, originals of both issues of The Armagideon Times are massively collectible. Even unautographed copies can fetch £100.



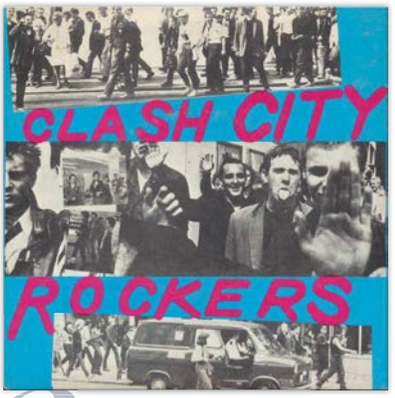


7 (WHITE MAN) IN HAMMERSMITH PALAIS/THE PRISONER

(CBS 1978)

The menacing atmosphere encountered by Clash frontman Joe Strummer at the titular London music venue serves as a framing device for a gloomy rumination on the state of punk, with The Jam in particular getting it in the neck. Ironically, some will have seen the gimmickry surrounding this release (four sleeve colours) as another sign punk was being cheapened.

Rarest 1978 CBS **£12-15**



6 CLASH CITY ROCKERS/JAIL GUITAR DOORS
(CBS 1978)

On a poor record, The Clash mock uninspired older artists while ripping off the riff of *I Can't Explain*, and are unsympathetic to people stuck in dead-end jobs. The single was varispeeded without the band's knowledge. Subsequent appearances have been at the correct, lower speed except – some ears insist – the one on a 2000 reissue of the American version of the first album.

Rarest 1978 CBS **£6-8**

4 REMOTE CONTROL/ LONDON'S BURNING (LIVE)
(CBS 1977)

Remote Control was one of the first album's weaker tracks. CBS released it as The Clash's second 45 without the band's consent. As an enticement, the label threw on the B-side a live version of the same album's *London's Burning*, with a note on the rear of the sleeve fatuously making a virtue of the fact of it being monaural (the front was just a variation of the LP sleeve). The band refused to promote it; it failed to chart.

Rarest CBS (Netherlands) **£100**

2 THE CLASH
(CBS 1977)

The first album's murky production was technically poor, but it provided an appropriate patina of menace to streetwise vignettes that summed up the decay and chaos of 70s Britain. The most collectible copies are ones with a circular red sticker on the inner sleeve. As production of this sticker procured the 'Capital Radio EP', very few such copies are ever sighted and nobody should seek one out unless they're willing to part with over £100.

Rarest 1977 CBS
(UK first pressing with red sticker) **£100+**

5 COMPLETE CONTROL/ THE CITY OF THE DEAD
(CBS 1977)

That the title of the next Clash single echoed the previous one was a coincidence, but appropriate. *Complete Control* was written in fury at what the band felt to be CBS' high-handedness over *Remote Control* ("We didn't want it on the label!"), although The Clash's grievances also included matters such as punks being harassed by the media and the police. It was hailed as an instant classic.

Rarest CBS 1983 (Ireland) **£57**

3 CAPITAL RADIO EP
(CBS 1977)

The 7" EP yielded by the combination of the first album's red sticker and a coupon printed in the *NME* was untitled. Although the bellicose broadside against the conservatism of London's independent station (misspelled on the label) was the final track, it's become known as the 'Capital Radio' EP. Though hardly substantial – its other tracks are a conversation with *NME* scribe Tony Parsons and a 27-second instrumental – its scarcity has made it precious.

Rarest 1977 CBS **£100**

1 WHITE RIOT/1977
(CBS 1977)

The Clash's urgent entrée saw them denouncing disenfranchised white youth for being "too chicken" to riot like their black brethren recently had at the Notting Hill Carnival. Despite the scant airplay received by this uncompromising single, it climbed to No. 38 in the UK chart. The Clash's value-for-money credo dictated that their records came housed in picture sleeves, making for the type of image – a rear-view frisk proposition – never before seen in rock line-up poses. ●

Rarest CBS 1977 (Australia) **£100**

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Classic Album

NICK CAVE AND THE BAD SEEDS

MURDER BALLADS

For their ninth album, Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds took a creative left-turn by delivering a collection of songs that was as gruesome as it was enthralling. **Neil Crossley** assesses the sonic delights amidst the slaughter…

NICK CAVE AND THE BAD SEEDS
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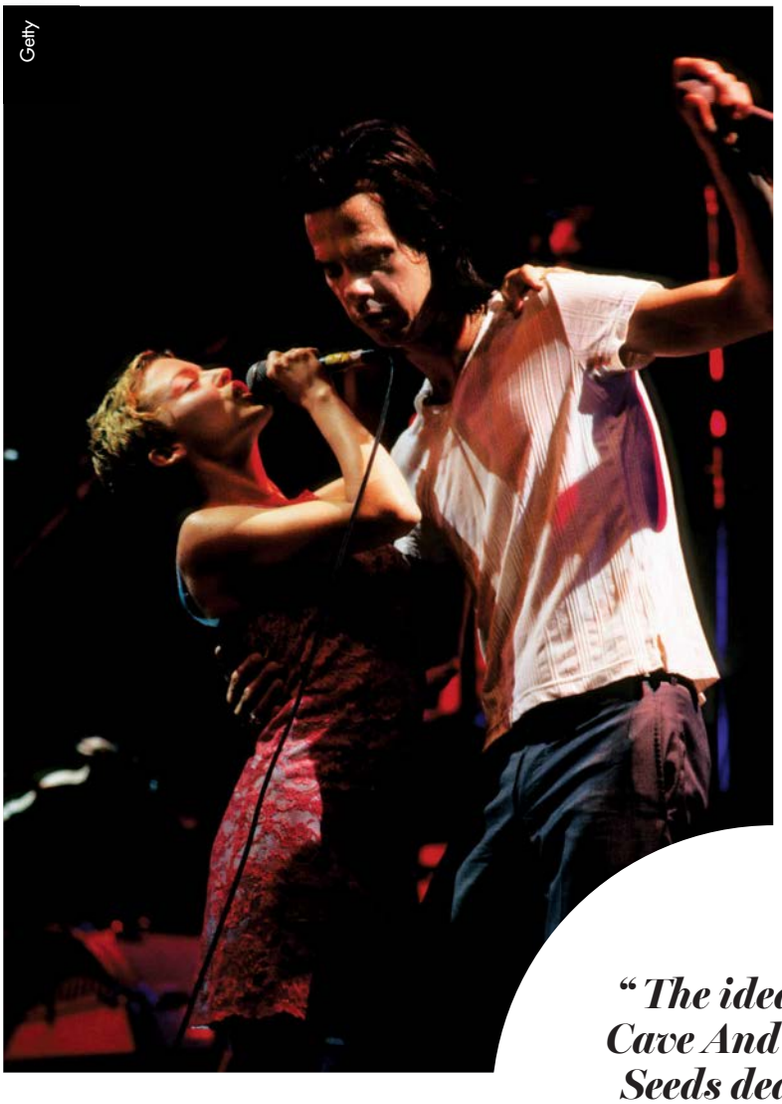
ADVISORY
EXPLICIT LYRICS
Murder Ballads


Getty

Anyone tuning in to the 19 October 1995 edition of *Top Of The Pops* would have been greeted by an assured and exuberant Kylie Minogue, welcoming viewers to the show. Standing to the left, rear and right of Minogue – with expressions ranging from boredom to mild bewilderment – were the besuited members of Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds. Cave and Kylie were performing their duet *Where The Wild Roses Grow*, from the band's forthcoming album, *Murder Ballads*. The irony of such a dark and visceral outfit as The Bad Seeds appearing on the UK's premier pop-music format wasn't lost on the band. But they were unprepared for the reception that awaited them.

"We were slightly agog… us having to go on *Top Of The Tops* and sing this stuff with Kylie," recalled Cave in the documentary *Great Australian Albums: Murder Ballads – Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds*. "It all became very surreal after a while, because we had a major hit in England with that song. What those little girls down the front are actually like, what they're actually saying to you when you think that they're actually clapping you, it's really into the lion's den. I mean… seriously."

"I think it took my fans a while to come to terms with that," recalled Minogue with a grin. "It's like, these Kylie fans down the front, just growling at him: 'Who are you?'. 'Who's that tall, scary man performing with her?'"

ROGUES GALLERY

Where The Wild Roses Grow was Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds' most commercial single to date and brought the band and the album to the attention of a much broader audience. The fact that the song was essentially about a woman being battered to death with a rock did nothing to diminish its success. Throughout *Murder Ballads*, Cave gleefully populated the songs with a rogues gallery of some of the most despicable, murderous characters imaginable: from psychotic serial killers and damned souls to a teenage banshee-wailing schoolgirl, basking in the vicious slaughter of her fellow villagers. By the close of the album, the death toll had reached 75, plus one dog.

Such characters fuelled Cave's rich lyricism and fed his abundant dark wit. The Bad Seeds, at this point, were a band at the peak of their powers, a fearsome outfit that breathed real fire into *Murder Ballads*, but one always capable of great musical restraint. Cave has often spoken of *Murder Ballads* as being something of a "holiday" for himself and The Bad Seeds, and there is certainly a playfulness here. This is an album with a glorious, gleeful sense of abandon – and one that, despite its lyrical depravity, is one of his most musically ornate and accessible works. Over three decades on, it remains one of their finest recorded achievements.

EARLY YEARS

Nick Cave was no stranger to the concept of 'murder ballads', folk songs dating back to the 17th century that involved accounts of killings, told from the viewpoint of the murderer or victim. Such themes had permeated Cave's work since his formative years with The Birthday Party, whose confrontational post-punk earned them the dubious moniker of "most violent band in the world".

"The idea of Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds dedicating an entire album to murder kind of titillated us"

CONWAY SAVAGE

Kylie and Cave performing their duet *Where The Wild Roses Grow*, which reached No. 11 in the UK in 1995

Gallows Humour

The black humour that pervades *Murder Ballads* is one of the album's great strengths. "There are some very funny songs in there," says journalist Bernard Zuel in the documentary *Great Australian Albums: Murder Ballads – Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds*. "I think *Murder Ballads* let people feel that they could laugh, even if they were listening to an album full of songs about death."

The concept of the album also provoked mirth within the band itself. "It's always been loosely referred to in the band as the 'comedy record'," said Conway Savage, the Bad Seeds' keyboard player. Cave claims the album actually started as a joke. "Because the idea of Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds dedicating an entire album to murder kind of titillated us in some way, because it was so obvious," he said.

The Bad Seeds emerged from the ashes of The Birthday Party in 1983, formed around the nucleus of Cave, multi-instrumentalist Mick Harvey and guitarist Blixa Bargeld, from the band Einstürzende Neubauten. After relocating to London, they released their debut album *From Her To Eternity* on Mute Records in 1984, followed one year later by *The Firstborn Is Dead*.

Sound-wise, Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds were inspired by a mythic American Deep South, creating dark arrangements that drew on spirituals and Delta blues. Lyrically, Cave focused on themes of death and love. His narrative prose had echoes of Leonard Cohen, while his increasingly rich, resonant baritone evoked a darker, more demonic Scott Walker.

The 1986 album *Your Funeral… My Trial* showed Cave emerging as a songwriter of real depth, creating songs infused with Old Testament ideology and populated by 'bad' souls: the murderers, the white trash, the drunks and the prostitutes who would receive little or no redemption. Cave was a decade away from creating *Murder Ballads*. But already, the characters were moving into place.

Getty

Cave with his pre-Bad Seeds band The Birthday Party at the Ace, Brixton, 1982

The songs

Core personnel

Nick Cave Vocals, piano, organ, Hammond
Mick Harvey Guitar, acoustic guitar, organ, wind organ, bass, Hammond, space belt, backing vocals
Blixa Bargeld Guitar, vocals
Thomas Wydler Drums, tambourine, maracas, vocals
Conway Savage Piano, organ, backing vocals
Martyn P Casey Bass
Jim Sclavunos Percussion, drums, tambourine, bells

Main production credits

Atlantis, Sing Sing and Metropolis Studios, Melbourne; Wessex Sound Studios, London
Producers Victor Van Vugt, Tony Cohen, The Bad Seeds

Recorded 1993 to 1995
Released 5 February 1996 (UK)
20 February 1996 (US)

Mixed at Metropolis with Tony Cohen
Where The Wild Roses Grow mixed by Gregg Jackman at Sarm West, London
Mastered by Ray Staff at Whitfield Street

1 *SONG OF JOY*

The album opens with what is arguably the most disturbing track of the whole record; certainly one lacking in the gallows humour that balances out most of the other songs. This six-minute Gothic horror is the tale of a father who has witnessed the deaths of his family at the hands of a serial killer. The key to the killer's identity, we are informed, lurks in the pages of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. As with all the tracks on the album, the instrumentation was kept deliberately simple. The stripped-down arrangement is ominous and spacious, a fitting backdrop into which Cave drops verse after verse of graphic detail. "As if she saw into the heart of her final blood-soaked night/ Those lunatic eyes, that hungry kitchen knife". The carnage begins…

2 *STAGGER LEE*

Along with *O'Malley's Bar*, this track is one of the real tour de forces of *Murder Ballads* and is Cave's take on the American folk song, *Stagger Lee* or *Stagolee*, about the murder of Billy Lyons by 'Stag' Lee Shelton in St. Louis, Missouri at Christmas, 1895. In Cave's hands, the song is transported to a whole new despicable realm as he gleefully recounts the antics of "that bad motherfucker called Stagger Lee".

Cave and the band had been up partying, listening to the album *The Diary* by US rapper Scarface, when the track first came into being. "Nick said: 'Give me a bassline', and I just started playing," says Bad Seeds' bassist Martyn P. Casey in the documentary *Great Australian Albums: Murder Ballads – Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds*. "It's a great bassline," adds Bad Seeds keyboard player Conway Savage. "We had a really big, long piano, a big bastard, and I hit the lowest 'D' I could find on that… the whole room shook."

One by one, the rest of the Bad Seeds joined in and, within an hour, they had the basic track. "*Stagger Lee* is brilliant," says singer-songwriter and band friend Dave Graney in the documentary. "Nick delights in badness, you know? And he's thrilled by the badness. There's fantastic badness in that song. It appals him while he's doing it, but he amazes himself. He heaps it on and on, and he's drawing it from somewhere else." ▶

SUPREMELY ASSURED

Cave's songwriting went from strength to strength, a point highlighted on *The Mercy Seat*, a sublime seven-minute long song from the 1988 album *Tender Prey*, with biblical imagery and relentless sonic repetition evoking the final moments of a killer on Death Row.

By 1990, Cave had relocated to São Paulo, Brazil and was experimenting with piano-driven ballads. That year, they released *The Good Son*, a plaintive, mournful work which featured the magnificent ballad *The Ship Song*. By this point, three pivotal musicians had joined the ranks of The Bad Seeds: Swiss drummer Thomas Wydler, bassist Martyn P Casey of The Triffids ("the fucking rock of Gibraltar," says Cave) and solo artist and keyboard player, Conway Savage.

The 1992 album *Henry's Dream* showcased a harder sound, but it was their eighth album, *Let Love In*, released in April 1994, which was widely regarded as their most cohesive album to date. It was a masterful, elegant work, exhibiting a mellower, yet supremely assured Cave. It also produced one of their finest recorded moments, in the track *Red Right Hand*. The album signposted the band's future direction, whilst simultaneously harking back to their violent, visceral past. The challenge for Cave was how exactly to follow it up.

"I felt an incredible pressure to have to keep beating the last record we made… which I think we did"

NICK CAVE

Nick Cave performing with Grinderman at the Hammersmith Apollo in London, in 2010

CREATIVE STOP GAP

Cave responded by choosing not to try to eclipse *Let Love In*. Rather, he took a creative diversion, focusing on a concept that was both outlandish and yet wholly in line with the ethos of Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds: an album consisting solely of murder ballads. "I felt an incredible pressure to have to keep beating the last record we made, making a better one, which I think we've basically done," Cave told *With Guitars* magazine in 2011. "I wanted to make a record that was just enjoyable to do, that was open to various other musicians to come along and do exactly what they wanted to do and also to do lots of duets. I wanted other people to help me write the songs and I wanted to do a lot of cover versions… which was what we did as well. I've always enjoyed writing narrative songs and I've always especially enjoyed writing about murder and violence."

A RICH SOURCE

To help him research murder ballads, Cave enlisted the help of broadcaster, musicologist and good friend Mick Geyer, whose copy of *The Anthology Of American Folk Music*, edited by Harry Smith, proved a rich source. But while the research proved inspirational, only three of the 10 tracks that ended up on *Murder Ballads* were covers: *Stagger Lee*, *Henry Lee* and Bob Dylan's *Death Is Not The End*. The remaining seven tracks were originals, written specifically for the album by Cave.

The first track to be recorded for the album was *O'Malley's Bar*, which had been written four years earlier, while

recording the album *Henry's Dream*. The concept of a whole album of murder ballads came from this song, said Cave. "We couldn't use *O'Malley's Bar* on any of our other records," he told writer Clinton Walker in Sydney's *Triple J* magazine in 1995. "So we had to make a record, an environment where the songs could exist."

Much of the recording for *Murder Ballads* was done towards the end of the *Let Love In* sessions. By this stage, two other musicians whose sound would prove pivotal to The Bad Seeds' sound had joined the band: New York percussionist Jim Sclavunos and Australian-French multi-instrumentalist and composer, Warren Ellis.

ANALOGUE SOUND

In an age where digital recording dominated, Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds insisted on recording onto tape. "We are one of the few bands that use tape," said Bad Seeds bassist Martyn P Casey in the documentary *Great Australian Albums: Murder Ballads – Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds*. "We're not trying to make a perfect piece of music. We're trying to inject some soul into what we are doing. In some ways, we're very old-fashioned. That's how we achieve what we achieve, I think. From playing live in the studio. Particularly on this record, you can really hear that."

Recording for the album began with demos at Atlantis Studios in Melbourne, with the spirit of collaboration firmly to the fore. In addition to the duet with Kylie Minogue, Cave sang with PJ Harvey on the cover of *Henry Lee*. Shane MacGowan was another artist collaborating on the album, as the band invited friends from across the years to attend sessions and contribute to them. *Murder Ballads* co-producer Tony Cohen recalls that a spirit of bonhomie pervaded the sessions.

COLLABORATION IS KEY

"I remember seeing probably about 20 people all sitting on the floor, banging things and all sorts of stuff and basically having a huge laugh," Cohen recalled. "I think I once called them the Moron Tabernacle Choir."

The name stuck, and the Moron Tabernacle Choir was the credited name on the album for the congregation of friends who were invited to contribute backing vocals to the track *The Curse Of Millhaven*. "Those backing vocals were done as rowdily and roughly as possible," says The Bad Seeds' Mick Harvey. "They were all sent out and basically nobody bothered getting the note. So it just sounds like a complete rabble – which was deliberate."

While Cave draws on the theme of murder ballads for the album, the gruesome imagery evoked in his lyrics takes the concept to a whole new dark level. He admits that the dramatic element of the subject matter provided a rich and

A Rose Between Her Teeth

The striking video for *Where The Wild Roses Grow* was inspired by Sir John Everett Millais' 1852 painting *Ophelia*, and shows Cave's character laying Minogue's to rest in a shallow pond after murdering her with a rock (although this part of the story is, unsurprisingly, omitted). The video concludes with Cave's character putting a rose in Minogue's mouth and closing her eyelids. "It was really amazing… had her lie for a day in water," recalled Cave in the documentary *Great Australian Albums: Murder Ballads – Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds*, on the shoot for the video. "Dropping snakes in the water… a snake winding its way between her legs. She's lying there. I mean she was just unbelievable, just totally gives herself to the process… and I think that's why she's such an extraordinary performer and a national treasure."

The songs *continued*

3 *HENRY' LEE*

In addition to his duet with Kylie, Cave partnered with PJ Harvey, with whom he had a brief but intense relationship. Cave gave Harvey the choice of singing *The Curse Of Millhaven* or *Henry Lee*, and she chose the latter – but as a duet with Cave. Mick Harvey notes that both songs feature exactly the same chord sequence, but different tempos. As was the case with *Where The Wild Roses Grow*, the video for *Henry Lee*, featuring an intimate and spontaneous performance from Cave and Harvey, really propelled the success of the track. "That video was great," recalled Cave. "It was one take, you know. They just turned it on, we performed this little song to each other. It's very intimate. Things are sizzling away… I really like *Henry Lee*. I just really liked the words and changed them a bit and put my own music to it. I think Polly sang that beautifully. There's a sense she's kind of on her best behaviour. There was something about the way she sings it that was very effective."

4 *LOVELY' CREATURE*

All literal reference to killing is absent from this track, but its presence is all-pervasive. Wind organ fuels the oppressive, sinister feel, enhanced by the fact that the song consists of just one chord throughout. Katharine Blake provides additional vocals, a forlorn, repetitive 'La la la la la la la' response to the lead vocal from Cave, who is clearly revelling in his hissing, enunciated delivery: "Oh the sands my lovely creature/ And the mad, moaning winds/ At night the deserts writhed/ With diabolical things'. A haunting, hugely atmospheric track.

5 *WHERE THE WILD ROSES GROW*

Among the tracks on the Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds 2005 album *B-Sides And Rarities* is a recording of *Where The Wild Roses Grow*, with a guide vocal from the band's guitarist, Blixa Bargeld. This is the version that Cave sent to Kylie Minogue. "The version with Blixa singing it is seriously creepy," recalled Cave, who says the track was written very much with Kylie in mind. "I'd wanted to write a song for Kylie for many years," he said in the 2007 documentary *Molly Meldrum Presents 50 Years Of Rock In Australia*. "I wrote several songs for her, none of which I felt were appropriate to give her. It was only when I wrote this song, which is a dialogue between a killer and his victim, that I thought, finally, I'd written the right song for Kylie to sing. I sent the song to her and she replied the next day." Cave was inspired to write the track after listening to traditional song *Down In The Willow Garden*, a tale of a man courting a woman and killing her while they're out together. The 6/8 time song and its video had a profound impact on the success of the *Murder Ballads* LP; a haunting piece of pop history.

6 *THE CURSE OF MILLHAVEN*

Described as "a knees up – a sort of mad polka," by Bad Seeds bassist Martyn P Casey, this track is one of

The songs *continued*

the true highlights of the album and a staple of the band's live set, a glorious, gleeful litany of slaughter in which the listener rapidly loses count of the number of bodies being bloodily despatched to the hereafter. The narrator is Lottie, a 14-year-old mass murderer who repeats the refrain "All God's children they all gotta die," as she undertakes her grisly deeds.

7 *THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS*

This mellow, poignant 6/8 ballad falls somewhere between mournful sea shanty and a twisted 50s pop croon. Cave demonstrates impeccable feel and phrasing as he recounts the devastating tale of poor Mary, who leaves her home in Arkansas, travelling across Tennessee, just to see the ocean. Not too surprisingly, she never makes it, murdered by a man who introduces himself as 'Richard Slade'. The 'crying' from Anita Lane adds a tragi-comic element, while the glorious melodic piano from Conway Savage and the hushed vocals of Mariella Del Conte lend the song real resonance.

8 *CROW JANE*

Percussionist Jim Sclavunos is behind the kit for this track, which intros with some lusciously loose and fluid jazz bass from Martyn P Casey. It's the cymbals, toms and bass that pretty much predominate, with just smatterings of vibrato guitar and some piano vamps helping to drive the track forward. It's minimal – spare and spacious – with some potent descending BVs on the choruses from Geraldine Johnston and Liz Corcoran, as Cave charts another tale of cold-blooded mass murder.

9 *O'MALLEY'S BAR*

Along with *Stagger Lee*, this is one of the standouts of the album. The idea for the song came to Cave as he was woken by the sound of noisy holidaymakers "in some godawful German town like Essen", after falling asleep by the side of a hotel swimming pool. "And I was kind of in my suit and I had a hangover that you would not believe," he recalled in the documentary *Great Australian Albums: Murder Ballads – Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds*. "I didn't sort of have the energy to get off this banana lounge and find the room. I started to sort of write this song there – basically, give these German holidaymakers names and described them and executed them on the page. And this became like a diary notebook that I would have, that I would keep adding to whenever anyone irritated me on my travels." Cave wrote reams of lyrics and it soon turned into an epic. "He just started playing this song on the piano, which had about 5,000 verses," said Mick Harvey. "After about half an hour of playing it with him singing relentlessly, we started to do a take of it from the beginning once it had settled into some form – just me on bass, Thomas on the drums and Nick on the piano."

10 *DEATH IS NOT THE END*

And so, after the carnage unleashed over the previous nine tracks, a sense of quiet optimism descends with this cover of the Bob Dylan song. Cave, PJ Harvey, Shane MacGowan, Kylie Minogue, Thomas Wydler and Blixa Bargeld each take on lead vocal duties, with each successive vocalist contributing on the choruses. Therapeutic though the song may sound, beneath the laconic pace, the simple vocal melody and flourishes of church-like piano, a sense of malevolence lurks.

rewarding creative source. "When I was writing this, I was getting very much into the idea of writing violently and what you can do with language. Of course, in rap music these days, you hear it all the time, but at the time, for me at least, the sort of stuff I was writing for this record I hadn't heard. I hadn't heard that kind of singlemindedness about this particular topic, put into songs and the real detail of the violence. There was something that was really exciting me about that."

ENDURING LEGACY

Murder Ballads was released in the UK on 5 February 1996 to almost unanimous critical acclaim. Clark Collis in *Select* magazine remarked that the album "weaves itself together into a meditation on death that is both beautiful and genuinely unnerving".

11 days later, the album was released in the US, where the reception was equally effusive. Bill Van Parys of *Rolling Stone* wrote that "never before have manic elements elevated Cave's shtick to art as on *Murder Ballads*". He went on to describe the album as "literate, sultry and tortured" and "the performance of Nick Cave's life".

Tony Scherman of *Entertainment Weekly* noted that while *Murder Ballads* was "not for the squeamish," it is "the rare pop record that resonates with the weight of the ages".
In 1997, Cave would release the follow-up album *The Boatman's Call*, whose graceful, minimal and melancholic songs could not have been further from the joyous blood-splattered abandon of *Murder Ballads*. In some ways, *Murder Ballads* was a time out for Cave and The Bad Seeds – a chance to simply revel in the joy of creating and playing together – and marks a dividing line between Cave the young performer and Cave the more mature artist. But this glorious, visceral album still stands as one of his greatest works. ●

Cave and PJ Harvey, promoting their *Murder Ballads* duet *Henry Lee*, a 1996 single

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Originally released in 1976, the recordings on *The Song Remains The Same* capture the band during a three-night stint at New York's Madison Square Garden in late July, 1973. This audiophile reissue is a half-speed-mastered pressing across four LPs on white vinyl. It's an impressive set, in an archival box with an extensive booklet featuring dozens of unpublished photographs, as well as six additional tracks that didn't appear on the original release.

What makes this edition from 2008 even more special is that only 200 copies were pressed, and subsequently never saw retail release at all after the band vetoed the idea. The 200 copies that were pressed on white vinyl were intended to be distributed with 100 for the band, label executives, press and promotional use, and the other 100 to be mixed in with the regular black-vinyl copies available only from their website.

Unfortunately, this wasn't cleared with the band first and they were unhappy with the plan. The white-vinyl copies were never distributed and very few have survived. Opened copies of this boxset have been known to sell for up to £1,000, but as some people chose to keep their copies sealed, this can reach closer to £1,300. It's a case of lucky dip with sealed copies, though, as there's nothing on the outside to give away the colour of the vinyl in the box. There could be more in hiding than have already changed hands, but it remains a highly sought-after rarity in the back catalogue of Led Zep. ***Glen Bushell***

COVER STAR

BRIAN CANNON

Brian Cannon and his creative agency, Microdot, created some of the most iconic record sleeves of the 1990s, for albums by The Verve, Oasis and Suede, among others. He tells **Murray Stassen** about a series of chance encounters that enabled him to produce a unique body of work…

A pair of chance meetings – with Richard Ashcroft at 6am in a petrol station, and Noel Gallagher in a lift – were pivotal moments in the development of Brian Cannon's career as an artist who has designed sleeves for some of the biggest bands in the world – including Oasis and The Verve at the height of the Britpop years.

The 90s rock 'n' roll iconography that Cannon created helped to tell the stories of young men who gained a near-religious following and inspired a new generation of musicians to pick up guitars, while Cannon's own work inspired countless others to pick up a camera. His designs were always planned meticulously and executed proudly without the aid of digital image manipulation and armed only with a camera, scalpel and a pot of glue.

His elaborate photoshoots often took many hours and days to stage, and were full of visual metaphors, paying homage to Renaissance painters such as Jan van Eyck, who he became interested in while studying graphic design in Leeds in the mid 80s.

Cannon says that he's never referred to other record sleeves when working on a project for a band; that he "owes more to classical arts" than any other record's sleeve and that the art for *Definitely Maybe* for example, "owes more to Flemish Renaissance paintings of the 1600s" than it does to any other record.

For Cannon, the key to producing album art as iconic as Oasis' *Be Here Now* or The Verve's *A Storm In Heaven* is being really into the bands and the music, and spending a hell of a lot of time on the artwork as a result.

"I would totally immerse myself in a project before doing it," Cannon tells us over a crackly phone line from the wilds of the Lake District. "I was a huge Verve fan. I was a massive Oasis fan. I just thought they were the best things ever. The more you get into something, the better it's going to be. It's obvious, isn't it?"

A NORTHERN SOUL

Cannon's story starts in Wigan, where he grew up and forged an interest in art from an early age, thanks to his dad. "He was a coal miner, a 100% blue-collar, working-class guy and never made a penny out of art, but he was an astonishing illustrator," says Cannon. "He could draw you like a photograph."

For Cannon's dad, becoming an illustrator wasn't an option when he was growing up in a working-class town in the north of England in the 1930s and 40s. "It passed him by, but he encouraged me to draw," Cannon says. "I was nowhere near as talented as him, but I certainly had a talent for it."

Cannon got into punk rock when he was about 12 and specifically the Sex Pistols, who he considered, "even at that young age, to not just be a music scene, but an art movement, in the truest sense of the word". He also cites the Pistols' artwork designer Jamie Reed as his favourite album-art designer. Realising he didn't "have the patience to play the guitar", Cannon started concentrating

"I THOUGHT [THE VERVE AND OASIS] WERE THE BEST THINGS EVER. THE MORE YOU GET INTO SOMETHING, THE BETTER IT'S GOING TO BE"

Brian and Liam at the launch party for *(What's The Story) Morning Glory?*

Tom Sheehan

more on the visual side of music, deciding to pursue a career as a record-sleeve designer.

He worked on his first sleeve when he was 19, for a single by Liverpool-based artist Tracey Carmen. The track was a cover of the Fontella Bass soul classic *Rescue Me* and it featured a shot of two schoolgirls climbing over some rubble in Liverpool in their uniforms. "It was quite an aggressive shot," says Cannon. "I did the photography and I learned a big lesson, because I've never really trained as a photographer. I've just made it up as I go along. I gave it to the guy from the record company and was like: 'Wow, this looks amazing, my first record sleeve'.

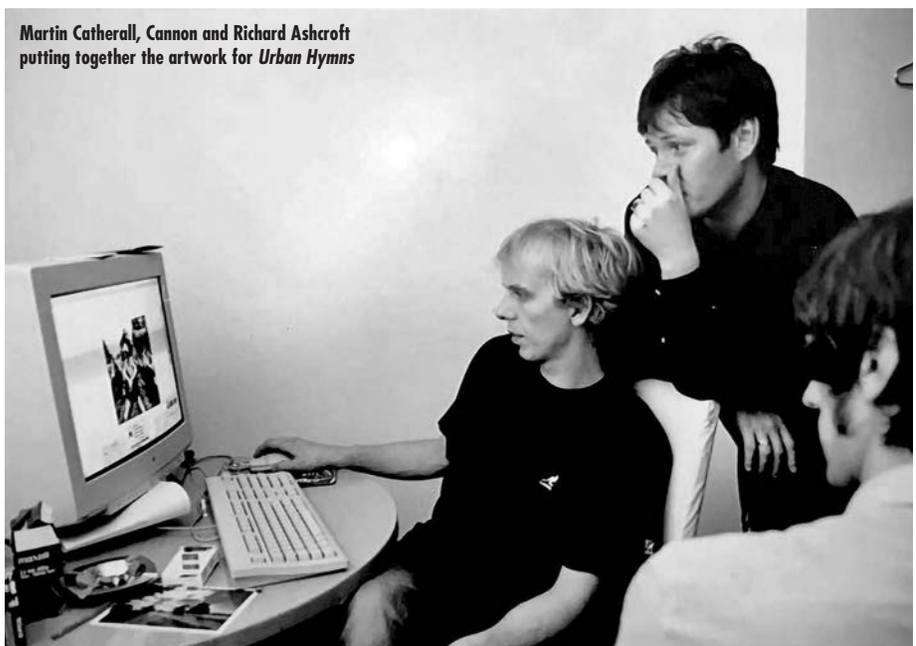
"When it came back, they'd put the type on and had done such a terrible job of laying it all out. That's why I became super-precious and insisted from then on that I'm doing it all. I see it all the time, great photography ruined by bad application of typography. Don't interfere with the image, that's king."

Paul Leveridge, aka Kermit of Black Grape fame, was involved in the Carmen project and Cannon went on to work with Kermit's first band, the Ruthless Rap Assassins. "I was working with them in 1989 and the first album [the *Killer Album*] was in 1990. Then it started taking off from there."

The idea for Microdot was conceived in 1990. Having tried to go freelance two years previously when he graduated from his graphic-design course, Cannon was struggling to be taken seriously by anyone other than his peers. "I realised pretty quickly that just ringing somebody up and saying, 'I'm Brian Cannon, I've just left college', the phone would be put down straight away. Nobody was interested, so I decided that Microdot was this agency, which I started, and that would give me more credibility and get me into meetings. I thought if I could just get in to see people and show them how passionate I am and the ideas I've got, it might start taking off. It didn't work. I didn't get any work like that. The only people who ever listened to me were other young people, like Richard Ashcroft or Noel Gallagher."

LUCKY MAN

In addition to Cannon's talent for visual art and his determination from a young age to succeed as a sleeve-art designer, there were ▶



Martin Catherall, Cannon and Richard Ashcroft putting together the artwork for *Urban Hymns*

Jill Hodgson

a couple of chance meetings that proved to be pivotal in his career trajectory. The first was with The Verve singer Ashcroft, who he met at an ex-girlfriend's house party in Wigan in 1989, before The Verve got a record deal in 1992. "We just got talking and we didn't seem to have anything in common," says Cannon. "He didn't dress anything like me, he was a lot younger than me, but I just made a connection with the guy. I never thought anything of it."

They wouldn't see each other for another three years, until Cannon went to a petrol station in Wigan at 6am one day to buy a pint of milk. "I bumped into this fella and he was like, 'Hang on a minute, you're that record-sleeve guy, aren't you? We've just been signed, we need somebody to do our artwork, do you fancy doing it?'. That's how I got the gig."

Cannon was subsequently informed that he would have to speak to the band's manager and was given contact details for someone he says he imagined was "some music Svengali in a big office", but who actually turned out to be one of Ashcroft's schoolmates.

"He basically didn't know what to do," laughs Cannon. "He put me in touch with the record company, who were not happy about this at all. They had signed this band, spent a lot of money and had these London agencies lined up. I turned up and they begrudgingly let me have a go, because I didn't really have any track record apart from these rap records that I did. And the first thing I gave them, they absolutely loved and we worked together for most of the 90s."

About a year later, Cannon stepped into a lift at an office building at 23 New Mount Street, Manchester, where Microdot was renting office space. Inspiral Carpets' HQ was also located there and one of their roadies got into the lift at the same time. Cannon explains that he was wearing a pair of Adidas trainers that you couldn't get in Britain, which he had acquired on a trip to Italy for his mum's 60th birthday.

"I had these trainers on my feet and this guy gets into the lift. I didn't know who he was and he was sort of checking me out," remembers Cannon. "The first thing he said to me was: 'Where the fuck did you get them trainers from?'. That's how I met Noel Gallagher.

"I told him I was designing record sleeves and that I'd just done two for this young band from Wigan called The Verve. Noel said: 'I've seen those, they're great'. The door was opening on the lift and he was getting out and said: 'I'm in a band, when we get signed I want you to do the artwork'. And that was that."

GAS PANIC

Cannon and his Microdot agency, which expanded to "around five people", went on to forge successful working relationships with both The Verve and Oasis throughout the 90s, with his artwork and the iconic Oasis logo that he designed (which he said he copied from the old Decca logo) appearing on the covers of several multi-million-selling records. Recently, Microdot has been commissioned to create art for big brands ranging from Levi's to Converse and Absolut Vodka, but in spite of the success and the place that his art and agency has secured in rock 'n' roll folklore, he insists it's never been about business, or money. "I've never looked at this like a business. Money has just been a fortunate by-product of doing it."

In closing, Cannon recalls the day he designed the sleeve for the Oasis single *Shakermaker*, to reiterate his point of how much fun it was to create the artwork for real, without Photoshop and with no digital help at all. "It was basically just me melting a lot of plastic objects for the photograph, and Liam and Bonehead showed up as I was melting things," he explains. "I had this big blowtorch connected to a huge gas tank and was wearing goggles. Liam turns to me and says: 'Fucking hell, you've got the best job in the world. Look at this, you get paid a fortune to do this for an Oasis cover.'"

"IT WAS BASICALLY JUST ME MELTING A LOT OF PLASTIC OBJECTS FOR THE PHOTOGRAPH, AND LIAM AND BONEHEAD SHOWED UP"

Brian Cannon on bass during the *...Morning Glory?* recording sessions at Rockfield Studios

BRIAN CANNON

OASIS DEFINITELY MAYBE

"It is effectively an anti-band shot, isn't it? It's posed to make it look like it's a fly-on-the-wall shot. But the point is the band is on the front of the album cover and they're not even looking at the camera, they're just watching the television. We went to Bonehead's (Paul Arthurs') house a couple of weeks before and did test shots. So there are pictures of me sat in every position. There's a shot of me lying on the floor, and Liam saw that and said: 'I'd like to do that'… It's completely staged. We worked out exactly where everybody was going to be. The still frame on the television is even freeze-framed on the VHS."

OASIS (WHAT'S THE STORY) MORNING GLORY?

"The two figures on the front were supposed to be Liam and Noel… I remember they just basically couldn't be bothered, because they were pissed the night before, or something along those lines. So it's me in the beige jacket and Sean Rowley, a friend of Paul Weller's. The idea was the two guys are walking past each other on the street facing each other, and one says something to the other. You're never going to know what they said. It's a question posed with no answers given, just like the title. What the fuck does that mean? Nobody's worked it out."

OASIS BE HERE NOW

"I can't believe there's ever been a more expensive record sleeve to produce. This was in the days when we were getting paid handsomely – that's a real Rolls-Royce. That car was in that pool. It was a scrap one. There's no engine in it, but we still had to pay £1,000 to hire it and then we had to find somebody with a pool that would let us put a Rolls-Royce in it. That's the difficult bit. We eventually found the location, which probably cost us another £1,000, and then we had to hire a crane. When all of that was done, that album sleeve cost £75,000 to do, and that was 21 years ago."

OASIS SOME MIGHT SAY

"That's my favourite one of the lot. It's my dad with the wheelbarrow and my mother with the mop. I love that sleeve. I was in the tourbus and Noel gave me a handwritten sheet of lyrics and said he wanted all the lyrics of the song represented in one image. That was taken in Matlock. That bridge connects to the other platform, and the other platform was still in use, so every half hour or so… I can't believe we never got stopped. We enacted all the words on the sleeve and my dad made that wheelbarrow himself. I wish I'd kept that actually, it would have been one hell of an artefact."

CLASSIC COVERS

BRIAN CANNON

OASIS ROLL WITH IT

"This was shot on Weston-super-Mare beach, the closest beach to Glastonbury, where they were playing that weekend. The TVs were all made by Panasonic. I hired those TVs myself from a shop in Wigan. Sony, who own the record company, obviously make televisions. I asked them if I could borrow five TVs and they said "No", so I had to hire them. Then I had to invoice Sony for hiring some TVs, and it said Panasonic on the front of the record and not Sony. What kind of nonsense is that? It was also red hot and they've got big coats on… There's about 200 people gathered behind the scenes."

VERVE
STORM IN HEAVEN

"On the vinyl version, there's four pictures, the front, back and two in the gatefold. It loosely depicts the journey of life. On the inside, there's a car on fire. I bought it for £60, drove it to the shoot site and set fire to it. The idea being, it represents the recklessness of youth… The next shot is a guy watching a video relay of himself staring at a TV, drinking himself to death. That sort of represents middle age. In the picture at the back, the guy in the cemetery represents not so much death, but the afterlife. It cost about two grand to do the whole thing."

THE VERVE
THIS IS MUSIC

"We used to spend ages doing these sleeves. Days, sometimes, but that sleeve was done in about 20 minutes because it was cold, it was raining. Richard just said: 'Look, you've got 20 minutes, then I'm off, that's it'. We shot it in Leeds, which is where I did my degree, and if you look at those buildings in the background, they are some of the few examples in this country of what you call true back-to-back houses. Now, they're not legal. The back of your living room literally backs on to someone else's living room."

THE VERVE
URBAN HYMNS

"We shot it in Richmond Park: there was a big group of deer running across and that's what four of them are looking at, but Nick [McCabe] just happens to be looking the other way. The conspiracy theorists said it was a symbol the band was going to break up, that Nick and Richard didn't see eye to eye, which is nonsense. He just didn't see the deer… The band said: 'It's a great shot, but can't we Photoshop Nick's head so that it's the other way round?' and even Nick said: 'No, because it'll turn into some kind of Frankenstein sleeve'." ●

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Transgressive A GRAND ADVENTURE

They started a label with £1,000 borrowed from a student loan and ended up with one of the most vibrant DIY talent havens in the nation, releasing records by the likes of Foals, Graham Coxon, Marika Hackman, Africa Express, Alvvays, Let's Eat Grandma, At The Drive-In and The Subways. **Sam Willis** meets the three kindred spirits behind Transgressive...

What can £1,000 really buy you? The technological marvels of telecommunication? Sure. A restorative holiday in some distant paradise? Probably. Genuine and meaningful cultural significance? Only if you have the fearless tenacity of Transgressive Records.

Their story is remarkable. It's one that was made possible only by a perfect storm of DIY ethics, the fierce optimism of youth, a keen ear for era-defining art and the ability to take advantage of an opportune time and place in British music history. If these elements had not coalesced in the way they did, their initial £1,000 investment – half of which was from co-founder Tim Dellow's student loan – may not have borne fruit. As it happens, it became the impetus for a label that helped define the UK's answer to the American garage-rock revival in the 2000s, and continues to support auteurs from all reaches of popular music.

Tim Dellow and Toby L – joined soon after by Lilas Bourboulon – established Transgressive in 2004, at a time when an influx of great music was flooding London. Tim, who had moved to London for university, says: "One of the first guys that really got in this with me was Kele from Bloc Party." Tim and his then-bandmate put out Bloc Party's first single through their very small recording operation. However, after signing another group off the back of that hype, the band and label went through a messy split. Tim then began to wonder whether he was "better at supporting other people's art rather than myself"; a realisation that coincided with him meeting Toby, who had also been working with Kele as a gig promoter for Bloc Party and their ancestral incarnations. After being introduced, Tim put it to Toby that they should start a label. Toby promptly told him to "fuck off", because labels were dead and the real future was in the internet and a nebulous streaming idea that didn't even exist yet.

THE SUBWAYS AND THE TUBE

Toby was sceptical, because of the outsider perspective he had as a burgeoning music journalist and founder of *Rockfeedback*. "I could see the transition happening," he says. "All of these CDs seemed obsolete and I was right about all of those things, so the idea of starting a label at that point was weird, but when we talked about it holistically, it made more and more sense." The decision was made, as all great decisions are, at the pub. After hours of talking about music, and a realisation their friends were in bands, but not getting looked after, they decided maybe it'd be good to start an independent label that looked after its artists. "That sounds like a really corny premise, but that was it," Toby says.

The £1,000 was then secured, and the wheels began to turn. "In the early days, that was a rolling fund," says Toby. "That would be enough to fund a single, in terms of manufacturing 500 copies, getting a press person on for not much money, a plugger on for not much money, and then we would invest it each time to make the next one." That first 7" was The Subways – Tim and Toby's favourite live band at the time – which was produced by Nick Abbott as a favour to Toby and mastered on a mate's PC for £30.

The DIY ingenuity was all-encompassing in that embryonic period. As well as the production and manufacturing process, the distribution was also done with audacious determination and the necessary frugality. "We'd call up record shops and then post them out to them, or carry them round if we were in London," Tim says. "We'd hand-package them all. Then it was the thrill of going into Rough Trade, playing it to them and they'd be like: 'Yeah, we'll take 150', and then us being like: 'Yes!' and carrying 150 from my flat on the underground."

The financial tightrope that they walked initially was also a symptom of the period of flux that music was going through. "You had the advent of Napster and those platforms bubbling up, so people not really knowing what was happening," says Lilas, who joined ▶

THE MOONLANDINGZ
PULLED APART BY HORSES
TOUGH LOVE
COSMO SHELDRAKE
BLAENAVON
FOALS
TOTAL LIFE FOREVER
Julia Jacklin
EASTWICK / COLD CALLER
SONGHOY BLUES
MUSIC IN EXILE
ALVVAYS
esser
satisfied
graham coxon
in the morning
At the Drive-In
ACROBATIC TENEMENT
IRON AND WINE
esser
Brawlface
liam finn
I'LL BE LIGHTNING
COSMO SHELDRAKE
PELICANS WE
MARIKA HACKMAN
WONDERLAND
MAISON DES JEUNES
FIST CITY
DRY THE RIVER
BLAENAVON

Songhoy Blues

Johnny Flynn

shortly after Toby and Tim first met. Although they all agree that, on paper, it may not have seemed a good time to start a record label, the upheaval had a double edge, as Lilas explains: "There were no assumptions of things selling 'X' amount. You just had to make sure you released amazing music that touched people. There was no way of being lazy."

With the music industry collapsing around them and the internet still a nascent opportunity not explored to its potential, rather than looking at the situation as the end of days, Transgressive decided they would rewrite the rules. "We never really knew the glory days," says Tim, "so a lot of what has become the norm is actually stuff that we've been a part of shaping… I think with the vinyl resurgence, I don't think it's overstepping the mark to say that we were definitely a factor in that in the UK." A championing of flexibility for artists through profit-share deals, coupled with an international vision, has become common culture amongst independents – as has their insistence that everything, where possible, is released on wax.

TRANSITION TO ALBUMS

Their natural enthusiasm for excellent music and the ability to predict what would chime with British youth meant that the first five records sold out – and that initial £1,000 investment quickly became £1,000 profit. More importantly, that initial period of growth generated a hype that ultimately secured them an exclusive distribution deal with Warner, and allowed them to put out records "properly". That relationship lasted three years, but the experience they gained during that time has secured their place in the upper echelons of indie labels.

The relationship meant that the team could now work on more substantial projects, with bands such as Foals and Young Knives, because it gave them the security and might of Warner's wallet. "It was a brilliant thing, but we were like 19 or 20 when we did that deal," says Toby. "What was great is that when we said: 'We want to work with these directors and we want to do it this way and we want to release it on vinyl. Everything has to be released on vinyl', when they weren't really releasing anything on vinyl, they listened to us!"

The trust that Warner showed in Transgressive's vision and ability was duly rewarded when they transitioned from singles to LPs. "The first record we put out was Regina Spektor and it sold like 30,000 or 40,000 copies," remembers Toby. That astonishing achievement, particularly for a bedroom label funded with a grand, was followed by the Young Knives' debut, which was Mercury-nominated and nearly went Silver in the UK.

What really comes across from speaking to the team is that yes, they are extremely proud of these achievements, but providing a valuable, honest and family-orientated service to their artists is what makes the success much sweeter. "We've always been very open and transparent with all of our artists, and I think

JENNY HOLLINGWORTH
LET'S EAT GRANDMA

"I think what makes Transgressive such a great group of people to work with is their main focus is always to build upon your vision as artists, as opposed to moulding you into something you're not. When we signed to the label at the young age of 16, they treated us like adults and have always respected our decisions and ideas… Without Transgressive, I can't imagine that we would have reached the stage we have now in our careers – and we're massively grateful to them for being amazing colleagues, as well as friends."

that's the big pitfall of the old-school music industry," says Lilas. "We're getting out of that now and there's more transparency. We've always been in partnership with our artists, and that's why we get on so well."

"I think it's fair to say we were all cynical about other record labels in general," continues Tim. "The point of doing this was to do something a bit different. There are a few labels which have been massive inspirations. I love reading about Elektra and early Island, and we talk about living legends and stuff like what Martin Mills has done with Beggars. These are all really amazing stories, but I think we've always wanted to do something a bit different and a bit outside. Something that's based on real friendships and hard work."

Entering Transgressive HQ, this is evident throughout the office. The team all sit in the round to share ideas; there are paintings in the kitchen by their early artists and, as we arrive, they've just returned from an artist meeting with a new signing. They're tangibly excited, eyes animated as they speak, and it's this joy for what they do that makes Transgressive a unique offering for artists.

Foals

EDWIN CONGREAVE
FOALS

"Tim and Toby were the first people to seriously consider our band back in 2006, and we signed to them more or less immediately. They're the same age as us and come from a similar place in the DIY scene, so we 'get' each other… They've provided thoughtful counsel over the years, and helped us tread the difficult middle ground between the credible underground and pop's incredible… I don't know, wasteland? You can see with their roster that they nurture bands over the long term, with a genuine love for people and music. It's been a joy to watch their business grow."

"THERE ARE A FEW LABELS WHICH HAVE BEEN MASSIVE INSPIRATIONS. I LOVE READING ABOUT ELEKTRA AND EARLY ISLAND"

GEEK PIE

One of the most significant working relationships of their "Part One roster" was with Foals, who signed following a pre-existing friendship with Tim. "Tim got to know Yannis and Jack, who are in the band, because they were playing shows together," says Toby. "Yannis and Tim kept in touch over time and, as the label grew, Yannis took an increasing interest in the potential of foisting his music onto us. I remember one day, Tim said: 'I've just received this demo from Yannis, my friend', who I was aware of loosely via that scene that I'd followed as an outsider, and he said: 'I think it's really good, but I need a second opinion, because I know him'. We played the four-song demo in the office and we knew immediately. It's one of those rare instances when you can hear something so raw, and we knew it was going to be important for us as a company."

However, that signing was not without its trepidation. Yannis and bandmate Edwin both dropped out of Oxford University to be in the band and some of Yannis' family, Toby recalls, weren't overjoyed. "I almost had a panic attack before we did the deal," he says. "We were in the lawyers' office and Yannis said, as the parting shot just before we signed it: 'You do realise that my uncle's going to come and hit you with a baseball bat if this goes wrong?'. We were like: 'It won't go wrong, it won't go wrong'. Secretly, I was like: 'Fuck, I hope this doesn't go wrong.'" Luckily for them, it didn't.

Young Knives were another success story – and it was only Transgressive who initially understood their brand of tweed-wearing anti-cool. "There was almost an exodus out of the fucking venue," says Toby about one of their first London shows. "Everyone was signing cheek-boned, leather-jacketed pretty boys in bands." Young Knives, on the other hand, were "wearing golf shoes with the studs taken out" and declaring that they'd much rather "go home and make a delicious pie" than be a part of the London

Blaenavon

Julia Jacklin

Alvvays

JOHN VICTOR
GENGAHR

"Working with Transgressive has been such a pleasure. I personally was really excited to work with them, having owned a lot of their 7"s and albums; Foals, Graham Coxon, the best Bloc Party single and Regina Spektor. I was always really impressed with their track record and how varied their roster has been, and it's an honour to be part of that heritage."

scene. This peculiarity, of course, sparked Transgressive's imagination. Groups such as Foals, Young Knives, The Subways, Mystery Jets, Two Door Cinema Club and The Shins helped Transgressive gain notoriety in that fertile period of garage rock and indie in the UK but, for them, it was always really important that they moved on from that quickly.

"We didn't want to be defined as a British, London, guitar, spiky, angular, post-Bloc Party label," says Toby. "That's what helped get us launched, but we wanted to get away from that as quick as possible."

So who from their current roster are they most excited about? "I'm really, really into the new Let's Eat Grandma album," says Tim. "I think it's maybe the best album we've done in 14 years. It's up there. It's kind of really unique, really soulful. The first album was really great, but they did that between the ages of 15 and 17. This one, they're 18, so they're ancient – but it's got classic songwriting, it's this whole immersive world. The production is unbelievable. We worked with David Wrench who's done Frank Ocean, The xx, Sampha and Sophie. It's just incredible. Watching them develop into something that's so good. When I think about what Transgressive is meant to be, it's kind of really soulful pop music that's meaningful and has weight, but that can be appealing as well."

> "I LIKE TO THINK WE'LL ALWAYS BE DEFINED BY WHAT WE'RE DOING NEXT, OR PRESENTLY"

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

Elsewhere on the current roster, Sophie – who also has production credits on the forthcoming Let's Eat Grandma record, alongside Faris Badwan of The Horrors – is, "turning pop music inside out and exploring its entrails to amazing effect". Listening to the music, the amount of divergence from the label's first signings to these new artists is enormous. "There are a lot of labels that operate in a bit of a time warp," says Toby. "They're defined by their legacy, and I like to think we'll always be defined by what we're doing next, or presently." Tim agrees that "you don't want to keep chasing and rehashing some sort of sad dream. You want to be challenged and inspired and move on."

All Transgressive care about is championing the work of auteurs – hearing music, free of the contextual fluff and posturing.

So, with even more questions about the financial security of labels in the wake of streaming, are there any silver linings left? "It creates more moments and opportunities for people to discover music," says Lilas. "People say: 'Don't you think it's a really tough time to be in music?'" says Toby. "I think it always is, if you're not positive. It's always moving, and that's a great thing. Imagine being in an industry where everything is the same, every day. It would be pretty boring. You have to look at it as a virtue and a challenge, and something to wrestle and enjoy. As long as the music is great and the art is fantastic, that's all that matters. Everything else is just a carrier pigeon."

After 14 years in the industry, Transgressive, by their own admission, are "a well-edited footnote" in the pantheon of music. However, their aspirations are lofty. Tim, Toby and Lilas still have youth and enthusiasm on their side and fiercely believe that their trajectory has the potential to make them a "real cultural influencer". Their alliance with technological advances, that desire to work harmoniously with progress, not against it, and their infallible ear for phenomenal music means that initial £1,000 may yet buy an empire. ●

Marika Hackman

The Antlers

Sophie

MrSpeakers

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LOCAL BANDS
BRISTOL!
INDIE

LONGWELL RECORDS
KEYNSHAM

Nestled in a historic market town between Bath and Bristol, Longwell Records is a shop at the centre of its community, run by a lifelong collector who wants to make a difference. **Gary Walker** wishes the Keynsham shop a happy second birthday

Record shops act as de facto community centres for music lovers the world over, and a sense of community prevails between the shops, too. When Iain Aitchison found himself exhausted and searching for a new career after 16 years working in drug and alcohol addiction services, a fellow store owner paved the way with a selfless act of kindness.

Adrian Bayford, who opened Black Barn Records in Cambridge after winning £148 million on the EuroMillions lottery in 2012, extended the hand of friendship two years ago. It was a life-changing intervention for Aitchison, who grew up in Southmead – a working-class Bristol suburb he describes as "rough as arseholes" – listening to ska, two-tone and reggae and catching the record collecting bug at the age of 11.

"I was a drug and alcohol worker in the NHS for 16 years, and came to the end of that contract in 2015," remembers Iain. "I was pretty burnt out from the sort of stuff I had to deal with day-in, day-out. It was a really good job, but 16 years working with Class A misusers was taking its toll."

SETTING UP SHOP

"I was looking for a way out, and I'd always loved music, and buying and selling records as a hobby. A really good friend of mine, Adrian, enabled me to set up the record shop. I was doing it online at first, and he said: 'Have you ever thought about setting up a shop?'.

"Having no retail experience at all, I didn't think I could do it in a million years. Being online suited me, but he gave me an opportunity I couldn't refuse and gave me the first few months' rent. It was one of those moments in life when you've got to take the opportunity."

Aitchison's choice of location for Longwell Records, named after the Bristol suburb he now calls home, raised a few eyebrows. Rather than setting up shop in the bohemian city he grew up in, with a thriving music scene and thousands of record collectors on tap, he opted for the quieter environs of the nearby sleepy market town of Keynsham – with a population of just 16,000.

"I was walking along the quieter end of Keynsham and saw this empty premises and I just knew," he recalls of the Temple Street site that had previously hosted a pancake shop, a barber's, a tattoo studio and a charity shop. Overcoming other people's doubt became a powerful motivating force.

"The resistance wasn't from locals, it was from people in Bristol," Aitchison explains. "People were pessimistic about opening a record shop in Keynsham, because of an elderly population and maybe not being as 'hipster cool' as a lot of places, but the town's got an amazing music festival; it's a real untapped resource, musically.

"If people say: 'You can't do that', I try to prove them wrong, just to show that things can work – being a drug worker for 16 years, that was my thing. There was a lot of snobbery. I wasn't well ▶

> "IF PEOPLE SAY: 'YOU CAN'T DO THAT', I TRY TO PROVE THEM WRONG, JUST TO SHOW THAT THINGS CAN WORK – BEING A DRUG WORKER FOR 16 YEARS, THAT WAS MY THING"
>
> **IAIN AITCHISON**

Iain Aitchison (right) and Kevin Gregory

Pictures Nicole Boulton

known within record shops in Bristol. I've been buying all my life, since I was 11, but I wasn't a major record dealer, so people maybe thought it was just a money-making exercise, but it's not about that. I love what I'm doing and want to prove it can work. There used to be two shops in the town, but we're the first record shop in a generation – in 20 years or more."

Attention quickly turned to filling the shop with stock as opening day approached and the reality of converting an online business to a bricks-and-mortar store dawned on Aitchison. "When we opened, we just about had enough stock – probably about 2,000 records. There was a lot of my private stuff, and I got records from Black Barn – they helped out, but I'd been all over the country buying stock from other record shops, too, spending thousands of pounds, getting discounts and building a rapport with other shops. Magpie Records in Chippenham were brilliant.

"The night before was terrible. It was a case of, 'Just put £3 on everything'! A lot of people walked away with a lot of good stuff under their arms for good value. I wasn't used to retail; it was carnage, but it was such an amazing day. It was like the whole of Keynsham was there."

The following months didn't prove so successful, and like most small-business owners, Aitchison had to grit his teeth and dig in. "It was so difficult, really tough," he says. "People would come in and look, and price up their collections, and we had people selling, but it was quite few and far between in the early weeks. The usual suspects were turning up – the dealers cherry-picking everything – but I didn't mind that at all, it was all about building up a reputation. It took a good six months, and then we started getting regulars.

"Graham Jones from Proper Distribution, who made the film *Last Shop Standing*, really helped, too," Aitchison recalls. "We showed his film in the local space. He came down and it was superb. It put us on the map a bit and that was another platform to move on."

STOCK FOR ALL AGES

Today, step through the doors of Longwell Records, navigate past the lifesize poster of Aitchison with old friend and avid collector Stephen Merchant, and you'll find a shop stocked with love, passion and an earnest desire to spread the word about new music.

Among the racks of 6,000 records, carefully curated sections of punk, hip-hop, reggae and country sit alongside a healthy spread of new releases, BBC sound-effects records, esoterica and records by local bands. On the Saturday afternoon we visit, the shop is bustling, Iain playing out Liam Gallagher's latest to a pleasingly diverse mix of ages of both genders. Record snobbery is entirely absent. "It ranges from 11, or below, right up to people in their 80s," he says. "The main customers are males in their 40s, but also loads of females, loads of kids from the local school sixth form. One of my proudest moments was seeing two sixth formers walking to school in Longwell Records hoodies. I feel so privileged to have that rapport with the local community.

"The younger customers buy a lot of Courtney Barnett, Will Varley, The Horrors, Idles, The 1975, Rat Boy, Here Lies Man, the Gallagher brothers, QOTSA, Kendrick Lamar, Arcade Fire, Sampha… Rat Boy, who is a big fan of the shop and a lovely lad.

"If someone comes in, I suggest they look in the cheap box first – we've got a listening station, go and put some records on and experiment with different kinds of music. That's what a record shop should be there for.

"Over the last year, I've had such a journey with new artists – Courtney Barnett, The Horrors, Will Varley, Michael Head… such beautiful amazing music, and I love passing that on to people in the shop. A lot of people say our prices are good, which I like to maintain. I've got to make money, it's a business, but there's nothing worse than people feeling like they're being ripped off."

While the vision for Longwell Records – which is set to extend to a second shop – was his own, Iain is quick to acknowledge the role played by Kevin Gregory, his sole employee: "It's not just about me; Kevin's knowledge, particularly around the soul and mod scene, is fantastic. He was originally a customer and he's the backbone of the shop. He's great with customers

> "YOUNGER CUSTOMERS BUY A LOT OF COURTNEY BARNETT, WILL VARLEY, THE HORRORS, IDLES, THE 1975, RAT BOY, HERE LIES MAN, THE GALLAGHER BROTHERS, QOTSA, KENDRICK LAMAR, ARCADE FIRE, SAMPHA…"
>
> **IAIN AITCHISON**

A LOCAL SHOP, FOR LOCAL PEOPLE...

lain's pick of local acts on the shelves at Longwell Records

DED TEBIASE
LANDSPEED

"This is my favourite record at the moment – it's instrumental 90s hip-hop, and I love stuff like that. I sold about 30 copies of that and all the proceeds went to a cancer charity."

PHOXJAW
VICTORIAN DOLLS EP

"Oh my god, they're awesome! Quite a heavy band, alt-rock, a bit garage-y. They're brilliant lads, and I reckon they're going places."

KINSMAN
LAST OF THE BRISTOLIANS

"Krissy Kriss, aka Kinsman, is a very-well-known wordsmith rapper I've known since our days being brought up in Southmead. I really identify with the vibe and he's supported the shop so much."

BOCAWOODY
CAROUSEL

"This is such a brilliant funky soul and hip-hop album, released last year and made by DJ Scott Hendy from Bristol and world mixing champ DJ Woody."

BIGLIKEBAZ
ORMOND

"This is from the same sort of school as Ded Tebiase – instrumental hip-hop. They're lovely people, they come in and they're gobsmacked that Keynsham has a record shop like this."

and he knows exactly what their musical preferences are."

MERCHANT VENTURE

Aitchison is also working on a film about the shop and its role in the local music community, taking some pearls of wisdom from his mate Merchant. "It's based around the shop, it's about the shop's customers and how their lives are affected by vinyl," he says. "It's going to be filmed over the next year; I want it to have a bit of comedy, a lot of funny stories and things that'll make your toes curl a little bit! We're going to do an *Antiques Roadshow* day with a panel of experts in the shop; we'll be visiting people with massive collections…

"I'm going to interview Stephen. He's a customer. He went to school with my brother in law and we've become quite good mates over the last 25 years. He loves vinyl, he's got a massive collection in his LA pad and in London. He came to visit the shop when he was filming *Logan*, he was brilliant. He likes Nina Simone, hip-hop, jazz… he's quite a soulful character, with an amazing knowledge of music. He's got a brilliant collection."

Aitchison, a father of three girls, continues to display the altruistic characteristics that saw him helping people overcome addiction for nearly two decades, and despite the low margin involved in stocking new releases, he continues to donate proceeds to charity.

"We stocked the Bread Over Bombs album, with all proceeds going to local food banks. It's an amazing album, and they came over from LA and played the Keynsham Music Festival," he says.

"The Streets reissues [*Original Pirate Material* and *A Grand Don't Come For Free*], too, there's a guy called Jasper Thompson who runs a charity called Help Bristol's Homeless, making old cargo containers into places for homeless people to live in Bristol. I suggested we sell The Streets albums, which are £29, and donate £5 from each one to the charity. It's gone well, and in future we'll be doing more stuff like that. We have to make money, but I want to do it in a way that feels good, and give something back to people who need it." ●

The Trip

Mega Record & CD Fair, Utrecht

Finally, our intrepid spinderella **Mark Elliott** gets to go to the ball – 2018's Mega Record & CD Fair in Utrecht, the greatest show on Earth for record collectors…

Nothing quite prepares you for the scale. We've all been to those fairs where the marketing has far outstripped the metre-age (you know, the events where the 60-minute journey there leads you to spend far too long loitering around half-a-dozen paltry stalls, later convincing yourself you could justify the price you've just paid for a Bowie rarity because there just wasn't anything else to buy). But the Mega Record & CD Fair sits in its own distinct universe. It is vast. Football-pitch vast, and if any crate-digging experience has come close to breaking me, this proves to be it…

I have a plan, of course. Across two days, my smug strategy is simple: spend the first few hours of the Saturday casually pacing the joint, working out the dealers I can haggle with and those where a swift sweep of the bargains will suffice. Get stuck into some boxes on the second round (estimated for some time after lunch) and then spend Sunday mopping up the also-rans (those discs that had caught my eye, but couldn't be deemed essential during the first wave).

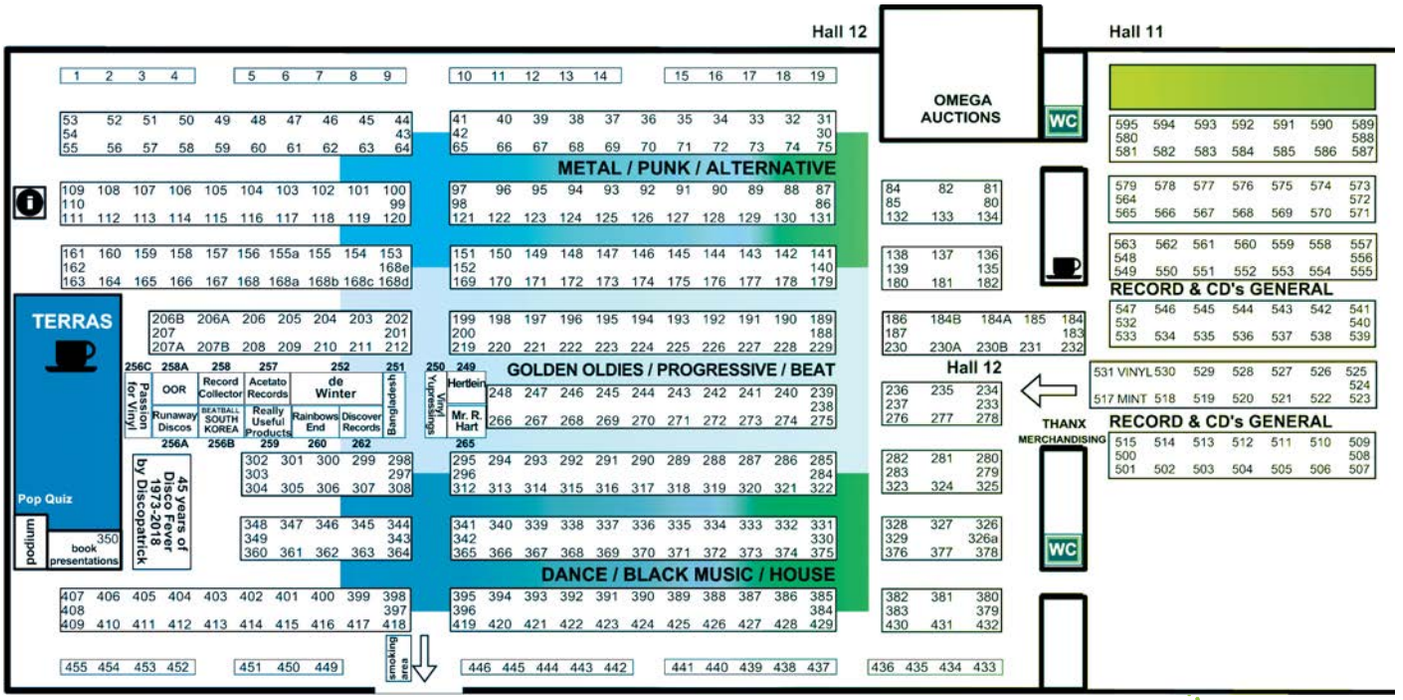
Within 20 minutes, my plan evaporates. I'm swiftly waist-deep in a German dealer's endless crates of 70s and 80s LPs – all mint and €2 apiece. Emerging, blinking, 40 minutes later, I realise I've made it past just four stalls; with close to 600 more to see – and just seven hours to see them in – it's clear that I'll struggle to complete a circuit in a day at this pace, let alone have time for the second and third rounds.

With close to 600 stalls to see, it's clear that I'll struggle to complete a circuit of the fair in a day

The reason for my plan? I've taken advice and decided to see if the theory that prices on the most coveted pieces will fall on the Sunday (with dealers allegedly reluctant to lug stock back home) proves true. I'm also fixated on two searches – Sandra's *The Long Play* (a huge European hit album from 1985) and a much rarer synth-pop release – Nik Kershaw's *James Cagney* 7", a release which was only issued in Germany.

Other than those, I'm determined to be surprised and, in that regard, the 49th Mega Record & CD Fair delivers in droves. You'll start and you'll emerge, blinking in the daylight, many hours later. Beyond that, one can only advise that you'll make your own path (although after two days, I do develop some simple methods for making this easier, which I'll share in due course). This truly isn't for the faint-hearted…

Illustration Ben Talon


Hall 12
Hall 11
OMEGA AUCTIONS
WC
METAL / PUNK / ALTERNATIVE
GOLDEN OLDIES / PROGRESSIVE / BEAT
DANCE / BLACK MUSIC / HOUSE
RECORD & CD's GENERAL
TERRAS
Pop Quiz
podium
350 book presentations
45 years of Disco Fever 1973-2018 by Discopatrick
Passion for Vinyl
OOR
Record Collector
Acetato Records
de Winter
Runaway Discos
BEATBALL SOUTH KOREA
Really Useful Products
Rainbows End
Discover Records
Bangladesh
Vinyl Cupressings
Hertlein
Mr. R. Hart
Hall 12
THANX MERCHANDISING
smoking area

Jaarbeurs Convention Centre
TIVOLI VREDENBURG
OUDEGRACHT
UTRECHT
DOM TOWER

FRANK HURTS

This Rolling Stones specialist has been coming to the fair every two years and, given the band's announcement of another tour, demand is proving high for the veteran act's material. "The tours are really important," says Tom Sattler. "It always leads to a spike in demand. The collectors are here for the rarities, but we do a good business for fans who love the memorabilia we sell." The rarest issue on sale is a 1969 Malaysian compilation, with a unique picture sleeve, retailing for €1,200.
It's interesting how many collectors are heading straight for the specialists. As the previous day had been restricted to dealers, it's clear that snapping up your wants list fast might be the name of the game… With the blaze of fluorescent strip-lights soon boring into my brain, the business of digging begins. Quickly, the stalls start to blur into one, with hundreds upon hundreds of boxes to sift through, each becoming more uniform than the last.
I cotton on quickly that, unless it's clearly a bargain, there'll be another, cheaper, option: I find three copies of Limahl's German-only *Tar Beach* 12" during the two days, and I've never come across a single one before.

SATURDAY

The queues are already snaking out of the Convention Centre doors as I arrive, just before 9am, on the Saturday. A few minutes earlier than anticipated, the polite lines of people – looking, well, rather like me, as I guess the younger ones enjoyed rather more of the legendary Dutch hospitality last night than I did – shuffle into life and I'm through. Confusingly, at first, I'm confronted with vintage teddy bears, chintzy crockery and old advertising hoardings. Has it all gone wrong before I've started? No, I'd merely forgotten the record and CD event is just part of the International Collectors' Fair, so, if all manner of curiosities are your thing, you're going to be especially challenged for time. There are hundreds more stalls featuring all manner of the strange. Following the general direction of (largely) bearded blokes like me, it becomes clear that Halls 11 and 12 are where the vinyl action is. Stalls are nominally organised into

DISCOLECÇÃO

This Lisbon-based retailer (with two stores in that city) comes to the fair twice a year (had I mentioned there's a second event each November?) and I was drawn to the dealer's startling array of unique picture sleeves displayed on the table. "We know a lot of people," Vitor and José tell me. "So this is just a small selection of what we have." It's an impressive set, for sure, with rare issues of The Supremes and Dylan battling for my attention. At €500, the unique Portuguese EP of The Who's *I'm A Boy* is the most striking, but is comfortably out of my price range. "This is the most important fair in the world," José tells me. "There is no other like it and we don't really even bother with the rest anymore. I pick my stock to bring carefully, and it's always a success for us."

B PEDERSEN

One of the joys of the fair is the chance to immerse yourself in a specific genre or era; this Danish dealer specialises in 1950s, 1960s and the Eurovision Song Contest. The latter is an interesting world populated by the rather obsessive and, while I flirt around its edges, I couldn't profess to be any true expert. Which is why this stall's sale box of Song Contest 7"s is so welcome – it allows me the chance to sample some unusual items. From Denmark's 1979 entry – Tommy Seebach's *Disco Tango* (it came sixth) – to Stella's entry for Belgium in 1982, it proves to be a deep dive (with many that I'd randomly selected for €2 turning out to be qualifying songs for Denmark that didn't even get picked). Perhaps I could develop a specialism of a specialism and really impress some of my Eurovision-addicted mates!

Many more hours of random searches follow. I sense you need to be super-disciplined to do this properly, and I'm just not. Too often, a box of assorted 'bargains' will soak up many valuable minutes and yield little. Then – right there, on the wall opposite – is a super-rare copy of The Spice Girls' *Spiceworld* – from 1997, when vinyl runs were so limited. The band's first LP has been reissued, but there's no sign yet of this one. At €150, this UK release is way beyond what my budget will stretch to, but I will come back on Sunday in the hope it will have been reduced. I can dream…

Another spot nearby is the 12" of Cliff Richard And Olivia Newton-John's *Suddenly* from Holland (the only territory to issue it in that format). This is a record I routinely refer to, describing how one Saturday in 1980 featured the purchase of this and Siouxsie & The Banshees' *Spellbound* on a trip to Woolworths. A decent – I like to think – illustration of how my broad but populist tastes were already developed at the tender age of 11. At €30, this goes into the 'Coming Back On Sunday' list.

It's now nearly 2pm and I need a break. I pause for lunch by the Omega Auctions room and, with somewhere to perch at a premium, sneak into the back, clutching a chicken with parmesan sandwich, Coke Zero and my expanding bags of records. Can I just say that quietly eating, balancing bags and trying not to move too much in case I end up bidding for some Led Zeppelin acetate proves to be one of the day's more stressful moments? I leave as soon as I can, as the bidding gets really scary.

I usually make a point of passing the UK dealers by, reasoning that their stock is more easily accessible to me and that there's just so much else here to choose from. One exception that I make – and I'm very grateful that I do – is Revolver. Here, I find the last of SAW's singles with Princess, *In The Heat Of A Passionate Moment*, which barely charted and is harder to find. Here's a copy for €2, with its rarer-still free poster pristine. It's another gap plugged in my PWL collection and represents one of my finds of the day. After buying more singles, I spend a bit of time checking out the exhibition of 45 Years Of Disco Fever 1973-2018, which gives me pause for breath, but I'm soon back at it…

Quietly eating, balancing bags and trying not to move too much in case I end up bidding for some Led Zeppelin acetate proves quite stressful

zones (prog, beats, metal, etc) but, in truth, I find there's little order to what you'll discover beyond the obvious dealerships. This keeps things interesting from the off.

The first obvious myth I'd like to dispel is that there are no bargains to be found here. While I think it's true that everyone selling knows the value of everything, there's plenty of interesting hunting here if you're prepared to wade hard into the depths. Take Queen's *Greatest Hits* – an exceedingly common album that you can buy new from a UK supermarket for around £20 and will

Getting there

The nearest airport to Utrecht is Amsterdam's Schiphol and there are direct trains, which get you to the city in about half an hour, every 15 minutes in peak times. Utrecht is also the most central train station in the Netherlands. You can travel from Harwich on an overnight ferry if you want to bring your car and central parking is plentiful. Outside the city, there are a number of railway stations with park-and-ride centres that will bring you in quickly and cheaply. The tram option – Transferium – is located at the Ring Utrecht South (A12, Exit 17) and you can leave your vehicle there, before joining the tram at the adjacent Westraven. Driving from the Dutch coast takes about 60 minutes, but traffic can be heavy during rush-hour. Once you're here, the Convention Centre, Jaarbeurs, is about five minutes' walk from the train station, with plenty of hotels nearby.

BANGLA DESH DISCOS

This Spanish dealer might bill itself as a CD-single specialist, but I find it typical of many stalls here, selling a bit of everything if you're prepared to hunt. Spain has some intriguing sleeve variants, and I source a mint copy of the Pet Shop Boys-assisted Liza Minnelli *So Sorry, I Said* 7", which first emerged on her *Results* album. The cover is rare and I pay a fraction of what I'd fork out online. I also buy a *Bedsitter* promo 7", billed to Marc Almond and released in 1993 to promote a compilation.

Now, here's a dilemma: I see a copy of the Madonna picture disc for her first album in Japan. At the time of going to press, in just over a week's time, I can (hopefully) pick up a reissue of it. The purist in me would love the original but, at more than €100, I think the power of Record Store Day wins out, especially given my strict budget criteria. It will be interesting to see if the price for this will drop in future, though. I doubt it…

Nearby, dozens more boxes of pristine German Maxi singles suck me back in and, with cash reserves dwindling, I need to decide (quite ruthlessly, for me) what to leave behind. I eke out every last coin and Barry Gibb's *Shine Shine*, Talk Talk's *Another Word* and the orange vinyl of Coldcut's *Doctorin' The House* make the list. Onto the next stall and there are yet more boxes of 12" singles: I find VG+ copies of OMD's *Sailing On The Seven Seas* and Donna Summer's *Cold Love*; the 1987 Tony Visconti Remix of Bolan's *Get It On* and a fabulous painted-portrait-sleeve edition of the Aretha and Whitney duet of *It Isn't, It Wasn't, It Ain't Never Gonna Be* (the sort of variant-cover issue that makes pop collectors like me swoon).

And then that's it, it's almost 5pm and I'm beat. I make my way back out through the vintage fair and, here, you need to keep your eye out. Some dealers stock a few records – especially 7" singles. I pass one selling off a library collection for 50 cents each and I make some final purchases, including a lot of Leo Sayer. Later, staggering back to my hotel, gulping down the sunlight and fresh air, I'm certain a lie-down and shower are desperately in order. The thought of going through it all again tomorrow fills me in equal parts with dread and yet more nervous excitement…

This Spanish dealer might bill itself as a CD-single specialist, but I find it typical of many stalls here, selling a bit of everything if you're prepared to hunt

set you back about half that, second-hand in most UK record shops. I see decent copies ranging from €8 to €25 and some slightly battered, but still playable, copies for a handful of Euros each. Looking for French, Belgian, German and Dutch 7" and 12" (Maxi) singles? These are an absolute steal and you could easily spend both days just sifting through these comprehensively. I set myself a strict budget: €200 a day, which is a pretty hefty spending target, but you can use it up in moments if you aren't careful (and no one takes cards). I see people leaving after a full day with only a handful of records; perhaps suggesting that many are coming here with a select few purchases in their sights. Not me.

Even by this point, my first big Day One mistake is obvious. The veterans have got this sussed and are lugging suitcases and even mobility trolleys around with them. My trusty record bag is clearly going to prove woefully inadequate. Just how inadequate I'm soon to find out, as the haul (including Animal Nightlife, The Hollies and Grace Jones) from the German dealer has only just got things started.

SUNDAY

The queues as the doors open at 10am are noticeably lighter on Sunday. I've had no luck with either of the two items on my wish list, so far, but I'm hopeful. Plus, there is still that *Xanadu*-lifted 12" from Cliff and Olivia, plus The Spice Girls to consider. The sight of *Star Wars* stormtroopers marching past jolts me momentarily, as I remember how much else of a non-vinyl variety is here; but I know I won't have time to sample any of it.

Major Mistake Number Two for Day Two is simple. Trying to remember what I had seen, and precisely where I'd seen it, the previous day is a fool's errand without proper preparation. After just a few minutes, you find your orientation is shot all over again and, unless you've taken a note of the stall number you spotted something on, there's a limited chance you'll ever likely find it again. I do find *Suddenly* fairly easily (it's still up there for sale at

Top Eight

1 IT'S ALL ABOUT THE MONEY...
No dealer appears to take cards here, and the cash facilities are limited. There are a couple of ATMs at the main entrance to the Convention Centre and there's a kiosk inside one of the halls, but it's closed some of the time. Make sure you're carrying a lot of cash. You will need it!

2 LET ME IN
If queues are long at the start of the day, the line-up outside Hall 7 seems to move fastest (it's situated in the middle of the two main entrance points).

3 LET'S GO ROUND AGAIN
Make sure you get your hand stamped if you want to re-enter the hall at any point. Without it, you'll likely be paying to come back in again.

4 THE SUNDAYS
It's true the dealers are more prepared to strike a bargain on the final day, so hold out for that prized find – if you're prepared to chance someone getting at it before you...

5 SEAL THE DEAL
I know us Brits are bad at this, but I find bargaining gets easier with practice. I saved a few Euros here and there – and it soon adds up. Smiling helps, too!

6 HE AIN'T HEAVY...
This is the big tip. Unless you're super-disciplined, make sure you have something easy to wheel around if buying records in bulk. I even saw someone with a shopping trolley, which won top marks for initiative. You may struggle with that on the plane home, though...

7 RISE AND SHINE
The fair opens an hour later on the Sunday – handy for a lie-in, but not so great if you've only got a day here, as both sessions end at 5pm.

8 EXPLORE THE CITY
Despite its rather stark suburbs, the city centre of Utrecht is charming and will keep companions amused if vinyl isn't their thing. I found the Volksbuurt Museum to be a great history tour for an hour or two, while the general shopping is excellent. As for record shops, De Grammophoon Winkel (26 Oudegracht) is worth a visit, but only open in the afternoons from Wednesday to Saturday. De Plaatboef (306 Oudegracht) is just up the road and sells a similar amount of used vinyl. Swordfish & Friend (43 Oudkerkhof) bills itself as a concept store, but has a lot of second-hand electronica. Muziek Staffhorst Vinyl (15 Willem van Noortplein) has a good selection of new releases, as does Plato Utrecht B.V. at 35 Voorstraat.

WORLD OF PICTURE DISCS

Now, here's an oddity. A dealer who doesn't have a website or shop and specialises only in the picture disc, a sometimes unfairly maligned format I happen to love (being an 80s-pop collector makes it mandatory). Peter Bastine, who contributed to Taschen's great *Extraordinary Records* book, started buying picture discs back in 1977 and stopped when he hit the 8,000 mark! His stock today is modest (he uses the fair to offload a few items), but the impressive display behind him, detailing the history of a format that began around 1905 as a playable postcard, is an education in itself. Two picture discs much prized by me are the infamous, impossible-to-source *Erotica* 12" by Madonna (withdrawn) and a release I think hit the shops but is so scarce it never even turns up on Discogs – Big Fun's *Handful Of Promises* 12". Peter has neither, but I do pick up the second Samantha Fox LP in three formatted segments (something her label had also done with her first release). There are boxes of shaped discs, plus genre-specific sections for metal, 'girls' and rock 'n' roll, which had a major 80s reissue programme in the format.

As the hours tumble by, I'm drawn ever deeper into racks of European picture sleeves: for example, sourcing nice copies of Cher (*Gypsies, Tramps & Thieves*) and a unique Dutch issue of the Mankind *Doctor Who* theme from 1978 (for €1, with Discogs listing mint copies for five times as much). There's still plenty of time for the curiosity – Mike Mareen's *Hey, Galaxy Man* is a picture of spray-on silver disco excess, but I doubt that it troubled the German equivalent of the Grammys much that year.

With the auctions over, I grab another cardboard sandwich by the stage to hear one of the bands – there's an energy to it that's all at odds with the harsh lighting. I salute the organisers for trying to keep things varied, but it's clear most of this crowd is here to shop. Sunday is noticeably quieter than the previous day (and Friday is a dealers-only event, which is where a lot of the serious business takes place). It's clear most stalls are by now up for a deal and, given my limited skill in this area, I head back to see if I can be united with Cliff and Olivia. Success! It's still there and I knock five Euros from its €50 pricetag.

Now, here's an oddity. A dealer who doesn't have a website or shop and specialises only in the picture disc, an unfairly maligned format I happen to love

DC OVERSTOCKS

These UK vinyl specialists, who regularly take a pitch at London's Spitalfields market, came to the fair last November for the first time. "This has been amazing again," Debbie Carey tells me. The stock is brand new and there's a good mix, saving you at least €10 from what you'd pay in-store. "We bring a van over on the ferry and have shifted a lot," she says. A lot of people have come to fill their own stores but, even on Sunday, there's still a good selection to be picked up. "We were discussing last night if CDs will ever make it back," says Debbie. "We still have a lot in storage, but we aren't convinced we'll be bringing it over any time soon!" I buy shrink-wrapped copies of Maroon 5 and Rag'N'Bone Man albums and could spend a lot more, if my money wasn't now running out. It's now about my 13th non-consecutive hour in the fair and I've finally completed a full circuit, stopping at, I'd guess, more than two-thirds of the stalls here. The predominance is UK and Western continental European dealers, but there are stalls here from South Africa, the USA, Asia and South America, too.

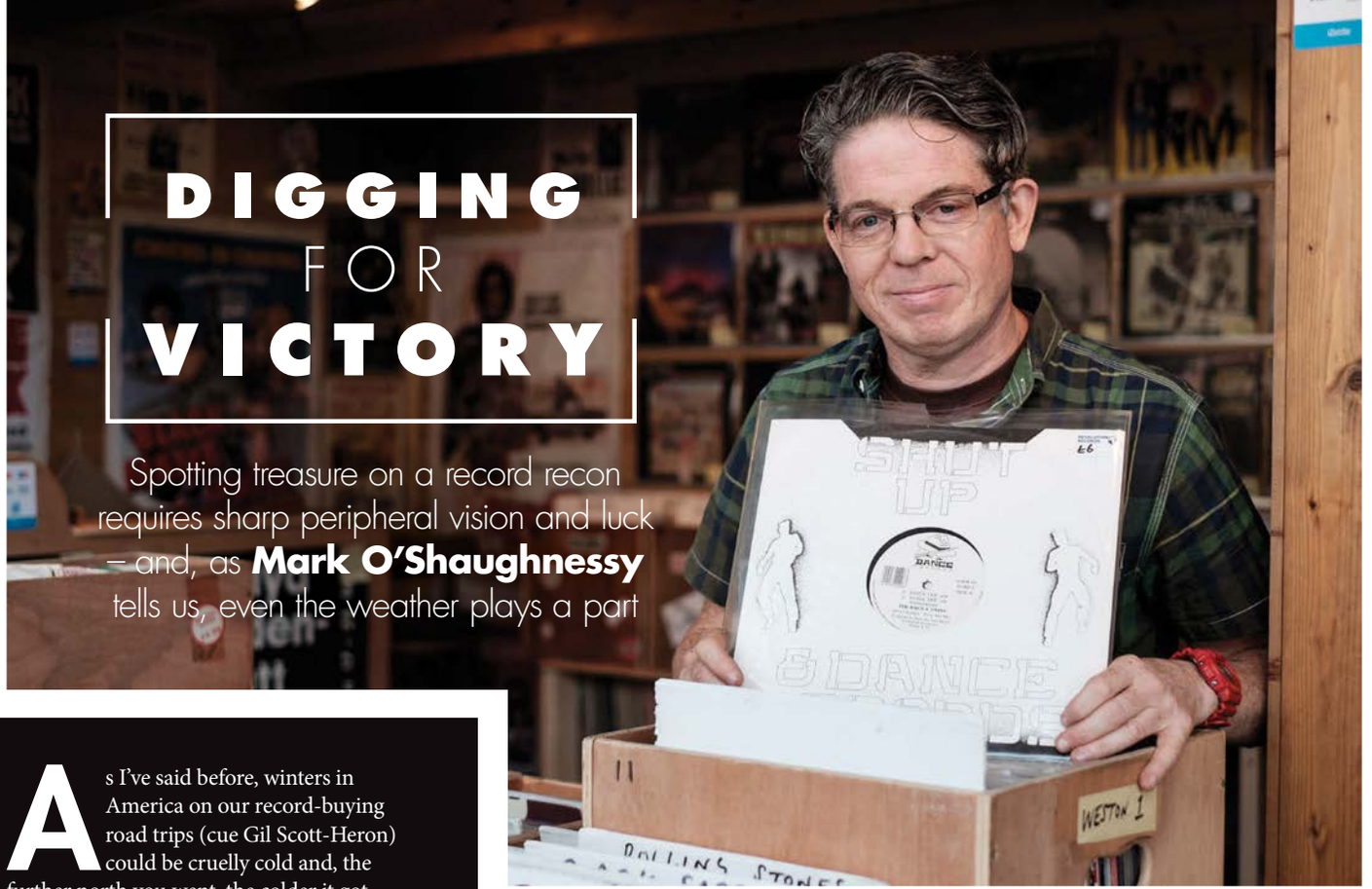
In truth, I can by now barely focus, let alone face another round, and so collecting together my final coins and notes, make another concerted swoop to see if I can pick up that elusive Nik Kershaw release. Mike Oxlong is a UK dealer who specialises in singles, but even his great selection doesn't yield a result. I finally concede defeat and head for the exit, pausing only to discharge my final Euros on a programme from Cher's 1992 *Love Hurts* tour. It's half-price, and seems a fitting place to end, as she is the definition of a fighter, and this has been a challenge like no other. Could I face another day of it? I'm not sure, but it's certainly impossible to cover properly in a single day. Next time, I'm bringing a trolley… but I did something right. I drove over from the UK, so at least I can be confident I can get it all home again. There's no airline cabin class on the planet that could cope with this weight. Now, if I can just get it back to my hotel…

I drove over from the UK, so at least I can get it all home again. There's no airline cabin class on the planet that could cope with this weight

€50), as the stall is near the end of an aisle, but can't for the life of me locate *Spiceworld*. Good job, too, to be honest, as it's selling for €150…

With crowds lighter today – and the welcome sight of reductions for the final day – I am soon stuck into more cratedigging, slowly edging my way down each aisle in turn. Within hours, I've bought a lot again but, just as I'm giving up hope of ticking something off my wish list, here in a disco section (a genre stretch, to be honest) I find a brace of Sandra LPs, including *The Long Play*. At €9, it's the same price I'd have paid for a similar-condition copy from Discogs, so I'm pleased I can stop fixating on this item. It proves you can come here with some sort of shopping list.

I chat to the team from Really Useful Products, who use the fair to promote their sturdy plastic storage boxes. When asked about the size of my collection, I sense the 20,000-odd items I quote is causing some excitement. It's true our recent relocation to Norfolk is requiring a radical rethink on how they're displayed. The fair is a great opportunity to examine accessories like this, but I'd estimate that there are fewer than 10 of these dealers exhibiting here. Vinyl massively outstrips CDs and memorabilia, too, at a ratio of eight to two, I'd guess… ●



DIGGING FOR VICTORY

Spotting treasure on a record recon requires sharp peripheral vision and luck – and, as **Mark O'Shaughnessy** tells us, even the weather plays a part

As I've said before, winters in America on our record-buying road trips (cue Gil Scott-Heron) could be cruelly cold and, the further north you went, the colder it got. It was a battle against the elements… especially in the more northerly states such as Illinois, New Jersey and Michigan. Aching fingertips were a particular problem in Detroit… ouch! On the upside, though, the spring/summer months could be extremely warm and welcoming, and it was often a struggle to remember that only a few months earlier, snow ploughs had ruled the streets.

Looking out of my shop window in Bath, watching the sun trying to break through on a warm April morning, reminded me of a mid-90s trip to NYC, and a particularly unusual vinyl haul that came our way due to the seasonality of the weather.

We were lucky enough to have 'sleep space' from a couple of fellow USA dealers, in their spare room, and my companion on this trip was my ex-partner in Resolution Records, Chris Fleming. Steve and Rob, our USA dealer buddies, lived out in Brooklyn, not too far from Park Slope, way off the main drag. We were extremely grateful – it saved us several hundred dollars renting rooms at the YMCA or seedy backstreet hostels. This kind of 'dealer cooperation' was much more common than it is now – Japanese dealers in particular having taken advantage of my spare room in Brixton many times down the years. We were staying five or six blocks from the nearest subway, and I don't know how many of you visited NYC during the early 90s, but it was a very different place from the sanitised metropolis it is now – panhandlers on every corner, drunks on the subway, prostitutes in full view at night.

Day three rolled by and we'd already had several good store hits in Greenwich Village. There were records everywhere in the Big Apple back then, readers – lots of good local soul and funk in the store racks (not much jazz, mind) and fairly priced – all scooped up and taken back to our buddies' crib in Brooklyn. And still a Record Show to look forward to (Days Inn, uptown) and a professional dealer to meet in Newark, NJ!

After a long day's digging downtown, we were bounding up the stairs from the train to ground level. I saw that the usual array of homeless people had already bedded down for the evening. Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted a (jazz) record sleeve that I recognised, peeping out of a box at the feet of one of the many rough sleepers. And, if you know me well, you'll know my 'sixth sense' for sniffing out vinyl in unusual places using my peripheral vision is up there with the best.

There at this dishevelled guy's feet were four boxes of USA-label jazz LPs, housed in tatty U-Haul boxes, all priced between $2 and $3, all in decent shape. My first move was to chat to the guy and find out his name. He was called Charles and was fully *compos mentis* – he wasn't a drunk, just down on his luck and selling off his possessions. Turned out he was an ex-musician, and I noticed he had a penchant for quintet/quartet sounds. Had this been an NYC winter, there's no way this man would've been sat there selling his life's stuff out of boxes at night.

If you know me well, you'll know my 'sixth sense' for sniffing out vinyl in unusual places using my peripheral vision is up there with the best

We agreed a deal and paid the man – he was so grateful… But what was I thinking? The golden rule of a hit like this is to ask the seller if they have any more at home. I tore off after Charles and found him two blocks away, just about to enter the night shelter. He confirmed he had more records, but couldn't get to them till tomorrow, because his landlord had changed the locks. We agreed to meet back at the subway, same time next evening, oh boy… But when we went back the next night, he didn't show. We waited two hours. I asked a couple of the other rough sleepers if they knew where Charles might be; blank expressions all round – damn!

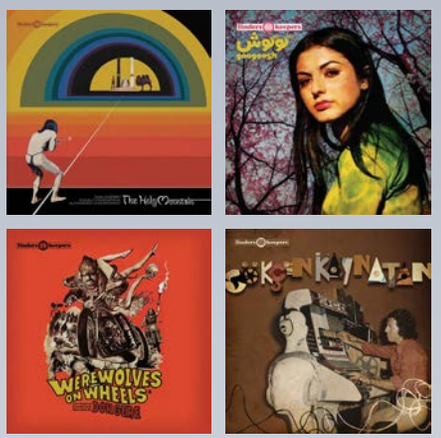
I still get occasional sleepless nights thinking about what else he might've had that we could have bought; best to try not to think about it, I guess…

PS – the LP I spotted outta the corner of my eye was Jon Lucien's classic *Listen Love*. I can never see that album without thinking of that trip. Charles, thank you! ●

Mark O'Shaughnessy is the owner of Bath record shop Resolution Records and has been a professional record dealer since 1993

Finders Keepers

Their rich and passionately curated label catalogue spans 60 years and 40 countries. **Chris Parkin** meets Doug Shipton and Andy Votel, whose record-finding obsession leads them around the globe, liberating a world of obscurities for your listening pleasure…



Doug Shipton is dog-tired when we catch up with him after his trip to Utrecht's Mega Record & CD Fair with his and Andy Votel's all-embracing Finders Keepers label. "As record heads, it's a wet dream," he says, drawing on the last of his vinyl-junkie adrenaline. "We always come back with stuff that we weren't hip to before; even records by artists we already work with that neither of us are aware of."

If Shipton and Votel don't know a record, then it's almost certain that you won't either. Their record-collecting habits are legion: "I'll turn over 50 shops for one semi-decent record and I boot-fair religiously; I'm jabbing my girlfriend at five in the morning and we'll do four or five before 10am," Shipton says. In 2005, they turned this obsession, plus their experience at Twisted Nerve and Cherry Red, and their DJing escapades with B-Music – filling dancefloors with Anatolian psych-funk and Bulgarian new-wave bangers – to set up Finders Keepers, naming it after Votel's 2002 compilation for Fat City Recordings.

They kicked off with Serge Gainsbourg cohort Jean-Claude Vannier's brilliant-but-ignored 1972 instrumental album *L'Enfant Assassin De Mouches* and quickly created a parallel universe in which 'forgotten' is a byword for 'essential'. They've since made a name with cult-film soundtracks, including the mind-frying score to Alejandro Jodorowsky's *The Holy Mountain* and Don Gere's stoner soundtrack to *Werewolves On Wheels*. They've also released music as wide-ranging and long lost as Persian acid-folk, early Turkish electronica and Buchla synth odysseys.

The label has matured since nearly disappearing after a 2011 fire that destroyed a distribution warehouse in Enfield. Thanks to Jarvis Cocker, Belle And Sebastian and others who put together *Make Do & Mend* mixes from the Finders Keepers catalogue, and those who bought them, they survived. "The love that came out was a real testament," Shipton says. "It showed we'd struck a chord."

"ANDY IS IMMERSED IN AND NEVER COMING BACK FROM THE WORLD OF ITALIAN LIBRARY MUSIC. WHEREAS I'VE BEEN DIGGING FOR EASTERN EUROPEAN MUSIC FOR YEARS"

13 years after their first release, they're still travelling the world "meeting local heads, knocking on people's doors, looking for old studios in Thailand", in search of music to release on Finders Keepers and its sub labels ("a by-product of our rampant insanity, a way to compartmentalise releases"). And, of course, they remain obsessed: "Andy is immersed in – and is never coming back from – the world of Italian library music. Whereas I've been digging for Eastern European music for years – Russian, Yugoslavian, Bulgarian records."

But with a huge increase in reissue labels, Finders Keepers' focus has shifted to "music that hasn't been in the public domain", Shipton explains. "Projects that stumbled, but had they been released would have changed things for the scenes they were born out of. But we don't have a plan. We don't have targets. If one is successful, amazing. We'll just do something a bit more risky." ●

Bruce Springsteen

THE ALBUM COLLECTION VOL. 2

COLUMBIA/LEGACY RECORDINGS

Anyone trying to follow an album as successful as 1984's *Born In The U.S.A.* was likely to struggle. Springsteen chose to lower the volume: his marriage's breakup perhaps hastened his retreat into himself, but if 1987's *Tunnel Of Love* was a more understated record, it remains among his finest: a subdued masterpiece of socially conscious portraits of romance. *Brilliant Disguise*, *Tougher Than The Rest* and the title track are particularly effective, but the desperately affecting *Valentine's Day* lingers longest. *Human Touch*, which attempted to bridge the gap between *Tunnel...* and *Born In The U.S.A.*, took another five years, but sadly lacked the former's warmth, though the title track's restraint and *57 Channels (And Nothin' On)*'s controlled tension ably compensated for the relatively empty bombast of *Gloria's Eyes* and *All Or Nothin' At All*. Released simultaneously in 1992, *Lucky Town*'s muscular Americana felt overblown, but 1995's hushed *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* returned him persuasively to *Nebraska*'s acoustic territory. Completing this 10-disc, remastered vinyl set are 1993's defiantly electrified *MTV Plugged* collection and a pair of rare EPs – 1988's live *Chimes Of Freedom* and 1996's brief E Street Band reunion, *Blood Brothers* – plus a 60-page book. *Wyndham Wallace*

VERDICT

8/10

LONG LIVE VINYL CHOICE

Love

FOREVER CHANGES

RHINO

A year after the event, Rhino treats us to a 50th Anniversary remastered boxset edition of unquestionably one of the best albums ever made. Disappointingly for vinyl fans, most of the extras are saved for the four CDs and DVD housed alongside the vinyl in a 12x12" book. The vinyl offering comprises original co-producer and engineer Bruce Botnick's stereo remaster, with the four CDs packing in the mono version, plus singles and outtakes. The DVD includes rare 1968 promo film *Your Mind And We Belong Together*. This is by no means the first time *Forever Changes* has been revisited, and yet its Summer Of Love paranoia and world-weariness has never seemed more prescient. The sublime orchestration barely cloaks a deep unease; the intricate fingerpicking, skittering violin and grand Mariachi brass of *Alone Again Or* and simple reflective beauty of *Old Man* coexisting with the doomy foretelling and frantic guitar work of *A House Is Not A Motel*. Epitomised by *The Red Telephone's* ominous opening line "Sitting on the hillside/ Watching all the people die", Lee's defining masterpiece articulated the ill wind gathering strength at the fading of the 60s, before the band's inner conflict and the lure of hard drugs took hold. *Gary Walker*

VERDICT

9/10

Gomez
BRING IT ON
UMC

Can it really be 20 years since Gomez's Mercury Prize-winning debut stepped into the post-Britpop void and soundtracked thousands of hazy late-90s university house parties? A record that wore its swampy blues, soul and R&B influences overtly on its poncho sleeve, *Bring It On* is remastered here on black, red and yellow vinyl. The joyfully naïve singles *Whippin' Piccadilly* and *Get Myself Arrested* haven't aged terribly well, but the tongue-in-cheek Mexican stereotypes of the lilting *Tijuana Lady* still produce a dewy nostalgic eye. Ben Ottewell's gravelly Delta-via-Derbyshire roar elevates the opener *Get Miles*, *Here Comes The Breeze* and the delightfully airy *Free To Run*, while the more pop-centric moments helmed by Ian Ball provide light and shade. Dyed-in-the-wool fans may yearn for the 35 additional tracks included on the CD version – sessions from BBC Radio 1 and their outstanding Glastonbury 1998 appearance among them – but this is a timely reminder of the year five northern lads with superb record collections conquered the world. *Gary Walker*

Miles Davis & John Coltrane
THE FINAL TOUR: COPENHAGEN, MARCH 24, 1960
SONY LEGACY

Released on vinyl for the first time officially, this Copenhagen date was part of Davis' overseas jaunt that would feature John Coltrane's last appearance with the quintet. The tension among the ranks, and in 'Trane's contributions in particular, was palpable on the first three tour dates, with the saxophonist playing wildly experimental solos. He's somewhat reined in here, though, but still manages to be expansive and hugely imaginative within the modal song structures. Opener *So What* is taken at a swinging, almost breakneck, speed. There's a slight pause for breath on an evocative *On Green Dolphin Street* and *All Blues* maintains a sultry vibe. Pianist Wynton Kelly's contributions should not be overlooked, either. For *Kind Of Blue* completists – and that should be all of you – this represents another fascinating piece of the Davis and Coltrane jigsaw puzzle. *Steve Harnell*

Sun Kil Moon
GHOSTS OF THE GREAT HIGHWAY
ROUGH TRADE

Mark Kozelek's (previously of Red House Painters) 2003 debut album as Sun Kil Moon still stands out as one of his finest, in a fertile career that's spawned a huge number of albums. His bare-bones acoustic guitar, coupled with baritone, spoken-word, stream-of-consciousness vocals has become the template for which he's known, but on *Ghosts Of The Great Highway*, getting a long-overdue vinyl reissue, the palette is much broader. Kozelek's younger voice creeps a little higher and the production is glistening as guitars shimmer, drums fizz and the arrangements blend together to form a traditional but also contemporary record of melodic and unshakeably infectious Americana. *Ghosts Of The Great Highway* sits alongside works by the likes of Songs: Ohia, Elliott Smith and Sparklehorse as truly groundbreaking examples of singer-songwriter craft. It's lost none of its sheen and vigour, despite Kozelek being a much less potent artist these days. *Daniel Dylan Wray*

VERDICT
8/10

VERDICT
8/10

VERDICT
9/10

Arctic Monkeys

TRANQUILITY BASE HOTEL + CASINO

DOMINO

Arctic Monkeys fans have grown accustomed to the band's development from one album to the next. Nevertheless, many will be surprised at their sixth studio effort which, save for Alex Turner's drawl, has little in common with what's gone before – his whip-smart lyrics have been replaced with oblique cut-up-style *non-sequiturs*. With the frontman co-producing with James Ford, *Tranquility…* feels as if it should be credited as 'Alex Turner Featuring Arctic Monkeys', with guitarist Jamie Cook seeming particularly in the shadows. Instead, what we have here is more akin to Turner's Last Shadow Puppets side project. The slinky soul-pop feel of opener *Star Treatment* sets out their new stall and, like previous album *AM,* there's a nod to 90s R&B on the piano-led *One Point Perspective*. After a sleepy title track, Cook finally makes his presence felt (at least fleetingly) on *Golden Trunks*. The funky wriggle of old returns on standout *Four Out Of Five*, but *The World's First Ever Monster Truck Front Flip* fails to live up to the promise of its wonderful title. The unifying factor throughout is Nick O'Malley, whose 60s-referencing basslines sound like Scott Walker and *Pet Sounds* filtered through an Air record. Too much, though, feels piecemeal and assembled from disparate fractured ideas. Ditching choruses, hooks and riffs, this will undoubtedly be divisive. *Steve Harnell*

VERDICT

6/10

Courtney Barnett

TELL ME HOW YOU REALLY FEEL

MARATHON ARTISTS/MILK! RECORDS

Though Courtney Barnett's debut, 2015's *Sometimes I Sit And Think, And Sometimes I Just Sit*, earned her a Grammy nomination as Best Newcomer, she'd already spent years perfecting her craft. Taking her time comes naturally: this second album is full of a leisurely charm familiar to fans of late-80s and early-90s American indie rock, something confirmed by 2017's collaborative album, *Lotta Sea Lice* with the likeminded Kurt Vile. Barnett seems to be influenced by The Breeders, heard in the atonal guitar lines of the accusingly titled *I'm Not Your Mother, I'm Not Your Bitch*, and Hole, whose Courtney Love Barnett echoes. There are also hints of a more polished Pavement in the upbeat *City Looks Pretty*, not least in her devil-may-care vocal delivery, and on another brilliantly titled tune, *Crippling Self Doubt And A General Lack Of Self Confidence*, which bounces along in a manner far more succinct than its title. There are also nods to Sonic Youth, especially Kim Gordon, on the opening *Hopefulessness*, a fiery, almost five-minute tune with closing incendiary guitars. The highlight, however, is *Nameless, Faceless*, in which she mocks online trolls with memorable lines such as: "He said: 'I could eat a bowl of alphabet soup/ And spit out better words than you'/ But you didn't." *Wyndham Wallace*

VERDICT

8/10

LONG LIVE VINYL CHOICE

Father John Misty

GOD'S FAVORITE CUSTOMER

BELLA UNION

It's a third full-length album in four years from Josh Tillman's ever beguiling alter-ego – and while last year's *Pure Comedy* was a challenging, at times impenetrable, listen – spanning 74 minutes and reflecting on the darkness engulfing politics, climate change and humanity at large – this time, the tone is often more summery. At least on the surface. For beneath all the three-minute songs and woozy Lennon-esque harmonies, *God's Favorite Customer,* written largely in New York in summer 2016 and early 2017, is an album that examines heartache, separation and the fleeting, giddy allure of freedom from all angles.

As ever with a Father John Misty record, the line between autobiography and multifarious observations through sometimes ironic lenses is opaque. The outstanding 'White Album'-evoking opener *Hangout At The Gallows*, with majestic cello and Harrison-esque lead guitar, ponders the big questions: "What's your politics, what's your religion?" against uncharacteristically breezy "yeah yeah yeahs". *Mr. Tillman* barely breaks the three-minute mark, a tale of misadventure which also finds him in unusually chirpy form: "I'm feeling good, damn I'm feeling so fine/ I'm living in a cloud above an island in my mind".

Just Dumb Enough To Try returns to *Pure Comedy's* more sombre territory, a reflective farewell with aching slide guitar and a brief, fizzing solo: "I'm just dumb enough to try to keep you in my life for a little while longer/ I'm insane enough to think I'm going to get out with my skin and start my life again". Its abrupt ending frames its devastating beauty, while *Please Don't Die* deals with more fear of loss: "One more cryptic message, thinking that I might end it/ Oh God you must have woken up to me saying that it's all too much/ I'll take it easy with the morbid stuff". Another sub-three-minute spin, *Disappointing Diamonds Are The Rarest Of Them All* sounds unlike anything Tillman's done to date, and not dissimilar from Elliott Smith with its slapback falsetto, jaunty piano chords and exultant brass.

The title track probes the relationship between sin and forgiveness, a searching, earnest chorus checked by Tillman's accompanying sense of wit and irony: "Beware the man who has everything/ Everything that he wants/ You can spot him from a mile away/ His gold chain and only one pair of socks".

The Songwriter is a sparse piano ballad, Tillman again playing with perspectives on the dissolution of a relationship: "What would it sound like if you were the songwriter, and loving me was your unsung masterpiece?". He closes a record that's as good as anything he's made with three more questions that hint at reconciliation: "I think the end of it all may look a lot like the beginning/ We're passed around from hand to hand, screaming for no particular reason/ The company gets pretty thin, so we start to shed all our distinctions/ So why not me? Why not you? Why not now?" *Gary Walker*

VERDICT

9/10

Gaz Coombes

WORLD'S STRONGEST MAN

HOT FRUIT/CAROLINE

Listening to Gaz Coombes' third solo album, it'll come as little surprise that he's managed by the same team as Radiohead. Coombes' songwriting has become increasingly refined, given to intriguing production details and quirky twists, such as the spiky guitar riff in *Walk The Walk*, and the malfunctioning keyboard that tops off *In Waves*, whose bassline's inventiveness recalls Colin Greenwood's, and whose atmospheric intro is worthy of *A Moon Shaped Pool*. Nonetheless, Coombes occupies his own world: the title track appropriates a lazy hip-hop flavoured beat for a falsetto-fuelled anthem, and *Shit (I've Done It Again)*'s regret-laden melancholy is worthy of an adult Disney movie. There's also the fierce *Deep Pockets*, whose krautrock rhythm propels it towards a thrilling finale, the unhinged paranoia of *Vanishing Act* and the stately *Deserter's Songs* decorum of the lovely *Slow Motion Life*. *Wyndham Wallace*

VERDICT

9/10

Josh T. Pearson

THE STRAIGHT HITS!

MUTE

It's been seven years since Josh T. Pearson released his acclaimed *Last Of The Country Gentlemen* album, and his 2018 offering is almost unrecognisable from its predecessor. A lot can change in seven years, and for this feline Texan, a lot has. Gone is the Jesus-esque hair-and-beard combo and with it, the black dog that led to one of the most dark and heartbreaking albums of the decade. He has instead rediscovered the joys of alcohol, drugs and love, and his musical output has developed accordingly. At first listen, this is a messy upbeat album which seems to take you on a journey through various musical genres – from punk and country to folk and math rock. There's a formula behind this, too – five pillars that Pearson adheres to. A few more listens will unearth some real gems, with Pearson's unmistakable twang shining through like a beacon of wisdom on a fresh-sounding record. *Laura Williams*

VERDICT

8/10

Lucy Dacus

HISTORIAN

MATADOR

After announcing herself with a debut album recorded in a single day, Virginia's Lucy Dacus returns with a fuller, more expansive second. Essentially a concept album, its thematic links unfurl with repeated listens. Opening track *Night Shift* begins in lyrically arresting fashion: "The first time I tasted somebody else's spit/ I had a coughing fit" and charts the stages of a breakup, finding Lucy "doing fine" but resisting the impulse to "punch you in the teeth". It builds to a fuzzy alt-rock resolution that grows ever more indignant in the chorus. The grunge-y *Addictions* and the grand, expansive exploration of creative burnout, *The Shell*, maintain the momentum before album centrepiece *Yours & Mine* – a protest anthem about the state of emergency declared on the streets of Baltimore after the killing of Freddie Gray. The emotive *Timefighter* and the seven-minute *Pillar Of Truth* pack some brilliantly raw guitar playing. Dacus has delivered an articulate, thoughtful record that bares its teeth. *Gary Walker*

VERDICT

7/10

Cavern Of Anti-Matter

HORMONE LEMONADE

DUOPHONIC

Building a collection of first-press kosmische and elektronische musik albums from the late-60s-to-early-80s halcyon period of German music will set you back more than a large family car. This is where Stereolab founder Tim Gane and his semi-improvised modular-synth trio, featuring drummer Joe Dilworth and drum-machine building Moog dude Holger Zapf, come in. Signposted with song titles such as *Phase Modulation Shuffle* and *Motion Flow*, Cavern Of Anti-Matter's third album of retro-futurist rhythmic workouts pitches up somewhere between the outer-space sounds of Harmonia and Cluster and the throbbing industrial synth music of pre-rave Sheffield. The trio have their sights set on the discerning dancefloors of psychedelia this time out, but *Hormone Lemonade* should still tick all the boxes for admirers of Stereolab, Pye Corner Audio, Ghost Box records and early electronica. *Chris Parkin*

VERDICT

8/10

Neil Young

PARADOX OST

REPRISE

You may struggle to pick out a coherent message in Daryl Hannah's experimental Netflix Western, *Paradox*, starring her current partner Neil Young and his band, Promise Of The Real. Is it an eco-protest flick, or a love letter to the redemptive power of music? Who knows? For its soundtrack, Young mixes things up with original material, live cuts and a dip into the archives. *Show Me*, a song from *Peace Trail*, is a recurrent motif in the movie, but it's a storming *Cowgirl Jam*, a live version of *Cowgirl In The Sand* apparently taken from his appearance at the Desert Trip festival in 2016, that will tempt fans. A solo take on old favourite *Pocahontas* also works well in the context of the visuals. Another highlight – that was never intended for the finished movie, just an offcut from when the band were larking around between camera setups – is Lukas Nelson's wonderful cover of dad Willie's *Angel Flying Too Close To The Ground*. *Steve Harnell*

VERDICT

7/10

Brian Eno

MUSIC FOR INSTALLATIONS

UNIVERSAL

Eno's latest offering is a monster nine-LP boxset of new, rare or unreleased pieces of music drawing from his work for physical art installations. Stretching back to 1986, his work has been exhibited at various venues, from the Venice Biennale to the Sydney Opera House. It's all new to vinyl, too. The entirely instrumental music, divorced from its original context, largely resists explanation; but most of it is made up of immersive painterly soundscapes, interspersed with more kinetic pieces. Eno's entire repertoire of sonic trickery is here – from the chimes, reverb-drenched piano and lava-lamp ambience of the opening pieces, through to the unsettling *77 Million Paintings:* this 44-minute-long track feels like an undersea realm where bizarre, undiscovered musical species – fragments of robot voices, distant bass notes and hollowed-out chimes – drift past your listening position. The overall effect is narcotic, otherworldly and destabilising, but oddly beautiful – and about as meditative and immersive as music gets. *Owen Bailey*

VERDICT

8/10

Iceage

BEYONDLESS

MATADOR RECORDS

Four years on since their Pogues-meets-The-Bad-Seeds triumph of a third album, *Plowing Into The Field Of Love*, Copenhagen's Iceage return with a record that continues to distil down their frenzied punk origins and expand on texture and songcraft. Singer Elias Bender Rønnenfelt's voice is still a half-slurred, half-snarled delight that moves between drunken lullaby and seething assault. The spiky, unrelenting guitars join this assault on opener *Hurrah,* and on the first single from the album, *Catch It*, they slow down to a groggy, very Velvet Underground-esque groove. There's a deep richness to the production on the record that coats the tracks: lap steel reverberates with vibrancy on *Thieves Like Us* and brass toots boldly on *Pain Killer* – there's even a touch of later-period Talk Talk on *Showtime*. Despite the group still only being in their mid-20s, they continue to evolve their sound with grace, depth and an ever-expanding palette.

Daniel Dylan Wray

VERDICT

8/10

Beach House

7

BELLA UNION

Pegged as something of a 'rebirth' album; a cleansing of the palate and the start of new beginnings and working ways, this seems to have paid off, as Beach House return with one of their finest records to date. Previous fans need not worry, this isn't a sidestep into black metal or drum 'n' bass; their shift is a characteristically subtle one. The album is still loaded with infectious, immersive melodies that intertwine with the breathy, fog-like vocals and swirling guitars. Few can create such dreamy, melancholic – yet pop-tinged – worlds as well as this duo, and they've crafted some mini paradises here, with the quiet euphoria of *Lemon Glow*, the gentle electronics of *Black Car* and the Fripp & Eno-like *Last Ride*. There's a construct to *7* that feels like an escape device: somewhere that sucks you in and doesn't spit you back out until the dying seconds of the album turn to silence.

Daniel Dylan Wray

VERDICT

8/10

Chvrches

LOVE IS DEAD

VIRGIN RECORDS

"I've been waiting for my whole life to grow old," sings Lauren Mayberry on *Graffiti*, "and now we never will". It's a brave, regal claim to immortality, but fair comment: *Love Is Dead* sounds like the work of a band stuck in permanent adolescence. They also appear to be unwilling to challenge themselves or their audience, their lyrics notably peppered with immature banalities such as *Forever*'s "I told you I would hate you till forever". Admittedly, they've sought to tweak their formula, bringing in producer du jour Greg Kurstin (Sia, Adele) for nine tracks, and another hitmaker, Steve Mac, to add his sparkle to *Miracle*. In the end, though, it still sounds like Chvrches, but now with added steroids, plus The National's Matt Berninger, who adds typically nonchalant vocals to the moody, comparatively restrained *My Enemy*. With their monstrous choruses, Chvrches do this well, but it's maybe time to stretch themselves.

Wyndham Wallace

VERDICT

7/10

Stephen Malkmus And The Jicks

SPARKLE HARD

MATADOR

It's been four years since the ex-Pavement frontman's last album with The Jicks, and the opening *Cast Off* welcomes the listener back to familiar territory like the warm embrace of an old friend. Malkmus' distinctive vocals, deft melodies, crispy guitar and idiosyncratic song structures are all present as the opener sets the tone for an album that feels both recognisable and progressive. There's always an undercurrent of sunshine pop to what Malkmus projects; even at his grungiest and strangest, he still works in sparkling melodies. This is present on the breezy *Solid Silk* and the very Pavement-y *Middle America*. Elsewhere, there's plenty of grit on the chugging *Shiggy*, as well as nods to Malkmus' ever-present love of Can on the closing *Difficulties/Let Them Eat Vowels*. Amid the shift in tone, pace and structure, Malkmus has crafted a pleasingly coherent LP that stands out as one of his strongest post-Pavement releases. *Daniel Dylan Wray*

VERDICT

8/10

Ryley Walker

DEAFMAN GLANCE

DEAD OCEANS

Ryley Walker says that there aren't a lot of (overt) musical influences on this, his fifth album, but the spirit of a variety of 60s and 70s touchstones still endures. Fans will be relieved that, rather than reinvent his sound, he's just delved deeper into aspects of it, for a complex, varied set that will reward repeat listens. The instrumentation, from a cast of musicians from Walker's beloved Chicago, contains a few surprises, including synths, flute and even some eerie delayed percussive craziness (on *Accommodations*). As for the highlights? Despite its more languid guitar lines, opener *In Castle Dome* has an air of Hendrix's most universal songwriting about it; Walker's ability to make disparate styles warm and pliant in his fingertips is evident as *Can't Ask Why*'s refracted soundscape intro coalesces gradually into focus; and *Opposite Middle* and album closer *Spoil With The Rest* are hopeful tunes, filled with a radiant energy. *Owen Bailey*

VERDICT

7/10

Simian Mobile Disco

MURMURATIONS

WICHITA

On their fifth studio album, SMD's James Ford and Jas Shaw have collaborated with the Hackney-based vocal collective, the Deep Throat Choir. The result is an album rich in haunting atmospheres and choral vocals that float above the minimal techno flow that skips underneath. The opening *Boids* is layer upon layer of vocal harmonies, creating a cloud-like texture that feels like an enveloping and welcoming introduction. The electronics join in on the following *Caught In A Wave*, adding a propulsive skip to the almost Cocteau Twins-like vocals. Across the nine tracks, it works as a heady exploration of ambience, melody and rhythm; something caught halfway between a club and a church record. The tempo and tone remains interlocked in this harmonious state, riding a wave of minimal vocal techno. *Daniel Dylan Wray*

VERDICT

8/10

Martin Freeman And Eddie Piller

PRESENT JAZZ ON THE CORNER

ACID JAZZ

Those of you who caught Freeman and Piller's Soho Radio and recent 6 Music shows will know that, as seasoned jazz heads, they're a very safe pair of hands as compilers. A beautifully diverse collection, there's no sense that the pair are self-consciously showboating to display the depth of their knowledge. *...Jazz On The Corner* sounds both cohesive and expansive, skipping from the knowingly urban Mose Allison with *If You're Goin' To The City* to Les McCann's pretty ballad *Sad Little Girl*. The telepathic interplay between pianist Cedar Walton and trumpeter Lee Morgan on the latter's 1968 gem *Psychedelic* stand out on a stellar opening side. Special mention, too, for Jimmy Smith's audacious solo on the wonderful A *Walk On The Wild Side* and David Axelrod's swaggering *Get Up Off Your Knees*. Hopefully, this will be the first of a long-running series.
Steve Harnell

VERDICT
9/10

Belly

DOVE

PLEDGEMUSIC

Mirroring her former band The Breeders, Tanya Donelly has taken the reformation of Belly up a notch by marshalling the troops into the recording studio. Although Belly reconvened in 2016 for a smattering of live dates, *Dove* is their first album of new material in 23 years. Less spiky than The Breeders' visceral attack, Belly take up where they last left off with tuneful 90s indie rock. Lead single *Shiny One* showcases the band's knack for an instantly memorable chorus. Likewise, *Human Child* builds nicely to a singalong midpoint. Among the standouts are the incisive *Suffer The Fools*, which picks away at the sore of a malfunctioning relationship, and the surprisingly country-tinged *Artifact*. The odd anonymous track fails to catch alight and will pass you by – we're looking at you, the overly polite *Girl* – but mostly, this Belly collection is well rounded and nourishing. *Steve Harnell*

VERDICT
7/10

We Are Scientists

MEGAPLEX

100% RECORDS

On their sixth album, We Are Scientists are almost unrecognisable from the band that people fell in love with on their 2002 debut album. Gone are the urgent, post-punk-indebted indie-rock numbers, and in come shimmering electro-pop and euphoric rock. While there's always been a melody-heavy approach to the group's work, underpinning a pop sensibility, the band sound as if they've wholeheartedly embraced this on this latest record. *One In, One Out* is the closest thing to dancefloor music the band have made, the synth-heavy wash recalling mainstream 1980s chart pop. While their desire to shake off tired indie sounds is admirable, some moments of the album work better than the others. *You Failed* is velvet-smooth synth-pop, whereas tracks such as *Now Or Never* occasionally slip into glossy U2-esque stadium rock. The group's ability to craft a hook remains undeniable, it's just not all of them sink in as firmly as others.
Daniel Dylan Wray

VERDICT
6/10

The Magic Numbers

OUTSIDERS

ROLE PLAY RECORDS

The Magic Numbers' fifth takes its title not only from the band's own status, but that of their songs' subjects: doomed romantics in The Beach Boys harmony-drenched *Dreamer* (which would give Fleet Foxes a good run for their money), biker women in *Ride Against The Wind* – which starts like The Stone Roses' *I Am The Resurrection* beat, then transforms into a brassy Eagles jam – and the "damaged goods" of *Runaways*, in which Michele Stodart's harmonies steal the spotlight from brother Romeo's lead vocals, perhaps explaining his closing Crazy Horse-style guitar solo. There are more Neil Young flavours on the rowdy *Sweet Divide*, too, while *The Keeper* nods to T. Rex, but the band's sensitivity is also on show: *Power Lines* underlines its gorgeous recollection of love's ability to overcome difficulties with a lush trombone solo, and *Sing Me A Rebel Song* provides a poignant, delicate finale somewhere between Beach House and Richard Hawley. *Wyndham Wallace*

VERDICT

8/10

The Beat starring Dave Wakeling

HERE WE GO LOVE!

ABSOLUTE

The first new studio album from The Beat Starring Dave Wakeling since 1982's *Special Beat Service*, *Here We Go Love* finds Wakeling in typically acerbic form, calling for the establishment's fall on the brilliantly titled *If Killing Worked It Would Have Worked By Now*, deriding a "stupid little arrogant fucker" on *The One And The Only*, and, on the energetic title track, digging even deeper into *Roger's Profanisaurus*. Musically, however, the tone is more in keeping with *The Love You Give Lasts Forever*'s sentiments: rough ska-punk edges are smoothed, something underlined by *You Really Oughtta Know By Now*'s Madness-like buoyancy. Those looking for the sound of 70s-peak Beat can turn to *Dem Call It Ska* and the joyous, accordion-fuelled environmentally themed *How Can You Stand There?* Wakeling's return to the studio after so long is a cause for celebration, not least because his last Beat venture was songs for *Scooby-Doo! Mystery Incorporated*. *Wyndham Wallace*

VERDICT

7/10

Amen Dunes

FREEDOM

SACRED BONES

New Yorker Damon McMahon's latest (fourth) album begins with a sample of a child snarling: "Their time is done, it's over... screw 'em." It's a statement of intent from McMahon, as he begins afresh on a sparkling record of redemption and soul-searching; "a relinquishing of self through an exploration of self", as the man himself put it. The process began when McMahon's mother was diagnosed with a terminal illness, and the cathartic release on *Freedom* is tangible. The hiss-and-drone-shrouded incantations of his previous lo-fi Sacred Bones LPs are replaced by woozily euphoric cosmic-folk songs that, with Delicate Steve and Yeah Yeah Yeahs' Nick Zinner on guitar, owe much to classic road-trip rock. McMahon's wobbling voice is bolder, too, as he weaves mysterious vignettes and memories through an album that would be obviously autobiographical if it weren't so compellingly mysterious. *Chris Parkin*

VERDICT

9/10

Genre Hopping

Globetrotting folk

Chris Parkin stamps his passport with a tour of artists who are creating compelling, often weird and frequently wonderful fusions of folk-music styles from around the world…

When indie-folk troupe Neutral Milk Hotel called it quits at the end of the 90s, their drummer Jeremy Barnes sought out new routes. After living in a Ukrainian neighbourhood in Chicago and travelling around Europe, he was introduced to the musical traditions of the Balkans and Caucasus. A fire was lit and A Hawk And A Hacksaw were born, with violinist Heather Trost joining in 2005 as the project's only other permanent member. The two have now released six albums exploring the sounds of South East Europe's old trading routes with Turkey and beyond, playing arcane local instruments and working with Hungarian and Romanian folk musicians.

The duo's latest (seventh) album, released in a limited-edition run of vinyl with disorientating psychedelic artwork via the band's Living Music Duplication label, is a crumpled gem that sounds as effortlessly made as it does haunted by the past. Inspired by the concept of Japan's medicinal forest-bathing practice after retreating to New Mexico's Valle De Oro National Wildlife Refuge, the band's homespun vision of Balkan and Persian traditions is given a new-age twist, with Turkey's Cüneyt Sepetçi and Hungary's Unger Balász delivering ghostly solos over a rattling, earthy backdrop.

Given their penchant for collecting music that crosses borders as well as time, Barnes and Trost will enjoy the music of South Korea's Park Jiha. She is one of a new generation of artists from the Korean peninsula exploring her homeland's tyrannised traditions. Korean folk music was nearly lost altogether when Japanese invaders strangled the culture in the first half of the 20th century; the dominance of Western rock and pop imported via US Army bases in the 60s and successive dictatorial regimes hardly improved things.

> THREE NEW COLLECTIONS FROM IDEOLOGIC ORGAN, THE LABEL RUN BY SUNN O)))'S STEPHEN O'MALLEY, WILL APPEAL TO THOSE INTERESTED IN GLOBAL FOLK MUSIC

But contemporary musicians are bringing Pansori and other strands of Korean folk music into the 21st century. Park Jiha's debut LP, *Communion*, on 180g vinyl courtesy of Glitterbeat's tak:til imprint, brings together exploratory music from the West, such as post-rock, minimalism and ambient electronica, with the solemn sounds of her homeland, played on the oboe-like piri, an ancient bamboo flute, and traditional mouth organ and dulcimers. The flow and emotional swell of *Communion* captures her culture's difficult past majestically.

Three new vinyl collections from Ideologic Organ, the label run by Sunn O)))'s Stephen O'Malley, will also appeal to A Hawk And Hacksaw's interest in folk music from around the world. The first is musicologist Ragnar Johnson's hypnotic and transportive 70s recordings of the sacred flute ceremonies of New Guinea, *Crying Bamboos: Ceremonial Flute Music From New Guinea Madang*. O'Malley's first collection of Johnson's field recordings, in 2016, were sampled by Björk, who fell hard for these sparse, shamanistic sounds. More familiar sounding are two exceptional mid-80s live performances by Hindustani Dhrupad master Zia Mohiuddin Dagar – *Raga Yaman* and *Ragas Abhogi & Vardhani* – which distil ancient ragas into their purest, most uplifting and cosmic form. All three collections prove that music can be weird, whatever century it's from. ●

HOW TO BUY BUDGET TURNTABLES

There are budget turntables… and there are budget turntables. **Paul Rigby** looks at the various flavours. Which is the best for you?

The so-called vinyl renaissance is still here and it doesn't look as if it's going away anytime soon. The proof is in the continued strength in sales of budget turntables, to analogue fans who are looking to get into the format for the first time, and those returning to the fold.

We receive requests from many of the above asking for buying advice on the best turntable for them. Apart from deciding on how much to spend on a budget turntable, though, probably the most frequent question we're asked is: "What type of budget turntable should I buy?". That's where this Buyer's Guide comes in.

In very broad terms – there are always exceptions – budget turntables arrive in three general types and I'm going to group those into appropriate sections for you. Let's look at the first.

AUTOMATICS

For older hi-fi users out there – and I can count myself as one of those, unfortunately – hi-fi used to mean record players. And record players tended to fall into three categories.

The first kind was the radiogram – these were comparable in size to the Titanic, were made from solid wood, were owned by your gran and were so large that houses were actually built around them.

The second type was the Dansette luggable (I wouldn't go as far as to call them mobile) variety – which meant a record player in a suitcase, basically, sporting front-mounted volume controls next to a front-mounted speaker (often featuring a hole where a rogue pencil had accidentally speared it).

Thirdly, there were those 70s music centres, which featured a record player, radio, cassette deck, toaster and cuddly toy, that most people I knew bought on credit from a catalogue, and paid 20p a week for 150 years to love and to hold.

All of these featured automatic play. That is, you never had to touch the tonearm. Button-pressing would start and stop the entire record-playing process for you.

Nowadays, there are many new turntables out there hosting just such

Lenco's budget L-3808 has a built-in phono amplifier and USB port

HI-FI USED TO MEAN RECORD PLAYERS. AND RECORD PLAYERS TENDED TO FALL INTO THREE CATEGORIES. THE FIRST KIND WAS THE RADIOGRAM; THE SECOND TYPE WAS THE DANSETTE 'TURNTABLE IN A SUITCASE' VARIETY; AND THE THIRD WAS THE 70S-STYLE MUSIC CENTRE

a feature. Downsides? Lower-quality sound. It comes with the territory, I'm afraid. The mere presence of the automatic gadgetry creates noise and vibrations, which decrease sonic quality. The good stuff? It's great for nostalgia – wonderful if you can't be bothered to get out of your chair to manually return the tonearm to its cradle when the record finishes, and ideal for technophobes who believe that merely touching the tonearm on their hi-fi may be enough to set off a thermonuclear explosion.

TOY STORY

When I say 'toys', I mean features built into a turntable that ideally shouldn't be there, but do add a host of positives (and negatives; there's always a yin and yang to turntable design).

These in-built features can save you cash, because you'll most probably need to buy them anyway; plus they add extra flexibility and reduce your hi-fi footprint. One of the most popular inclusions of this kind is the phono amplifier. Phono amplifiers are the specialists of any hi-fi. Their purpose is to do one job and one job only: take the tiny sonic signal produced by your cartridge (and it really is very small indeed), and increase the gain enough so that your main amplifier can say, "Okay, buddy, thanks for that, I can take it from here".

Every turntable needs one. Some are included in your main amplifier (if your amp has Phono sockets, then that's the phono amplifier bit); some can be bought as external boxes (this is the best option, because the sound quality is improved) and others are inserted into the turntable itself.

Downsides? Sound quality, again. More noise, more vibration, more masking of fine details… but the upsides mean that you're basically getting a free phono amplifier, and it's already set up for you to use.

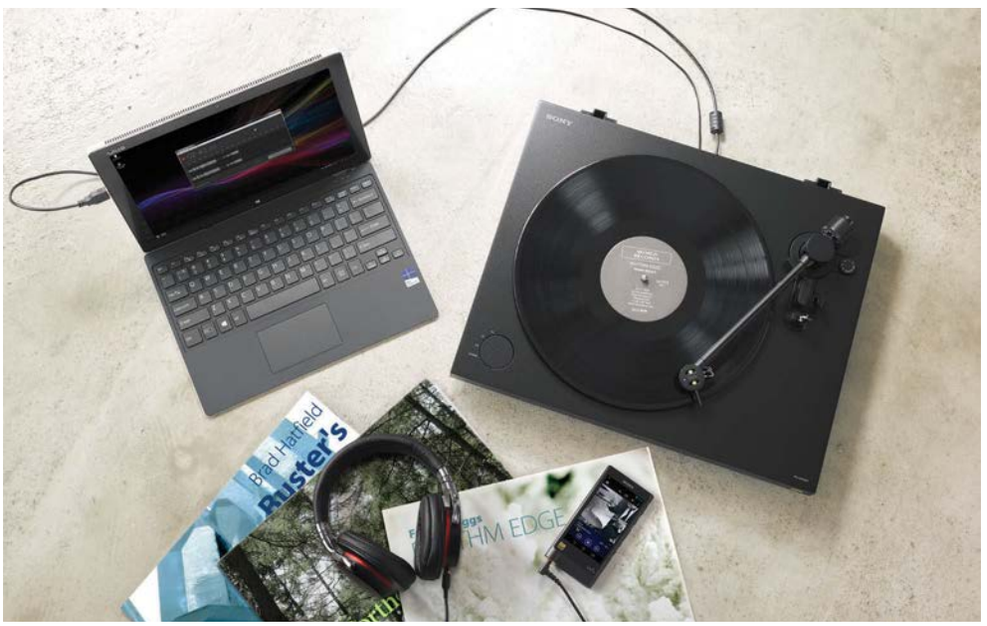
Other toys? A built-in USB port will mean that you can attach your turntable to a computer with a supplied cable and 'rip' your vinyl using the supplied software (which ▶

Audio-Technica's twin-speed, belt-driven LP3 includes a built-in phono amp and the option to switch between moving-magnet and moving-coil cartridge types

always tends to be Audacity… because it's free) to a digital file. Which means that you can listen to your records on a digital music player or on a CD-R, or somesuch.

Bluetooth has also been integrated into some turntables, which means that you can send the turntable's sonic output to a Bluetooth speaker, which might be in a different room. The wonders of technology, eh?

The USB-equipped Sony PS-HX500 rips vinyl to DSD-quality files



PURIST DESIGN

Amazingly enough, there are vinyl fans out there who just want to play records. And they want to play those records in the best way possible. That is, to obtain top sound quality from the grooves. Revolutionary, isn't it?

For these wholly weird people, there are turntables out there that shun toys, ban automatic-drive systems and do nothing but manually play a vinyl record. Nothing but that.

All turntable manufacturers create their designs according to and within a specific build budget. This cash figure can't be exceeded if they still want to make a decent profit. So it makes sense that if you have £100 to spend on building a turntable and some of it is being used to buy in a phono amp, a USB port, a Bluetooth gadget and an automatic-drive thingy, then there's not going to be all that much left for the actual turntable, is there?

Hence, for those designs that take the purist approach, the quality of the basic features tends to be that much higher: a better plinth, a better platter, a better arm and so on.

BUYER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

What budget turntable should you buy? Here's a broad selection, across three different types and price points. This is just a suggested list, no more. There are lots of others that I have not been able to include, due to space reasons. Why not get in touch and tell us about your favourites, so that other readers can be made aware of those, too? Prices are correct at the time of going to print. ●

AUTOMATICS

Turntables with an automatic mechanism built in…

BUDGET UP TO £250

AUDIO-TECHNICA AT-LP3

PRICE £199

EU.AUDIO-TECHNICA.COM

Based on the same chassis as used in the Dual MTR-75, the hugely popular twin-speed, belt-driven LP3 includes a built-in phono amp and a rather nice red headshell, plus a switch to move from moving-magnet to moving-coil cartridge (don't use this deck with moving coil, the latter option is overkill). Still good value – and it's solid, too.

MIDRANGE £250-£500

DUAL MTR-75

PRICE £250

WWW.BIGREDSALES.CO.UK

Twin-speed, belt-driven and featuring that automatic mechanism, this also arrives with a built-in phono amplifier and USB port. Sound quality is admirable. It does have a plasticky feel, but that's reflected in the very competitive price.

HIGH-END £500+

THORENS TD 240-2

PRICE £699

WWW.UKD.CO.UK

It's expensive for an automatic, yes, but this three-speed unit introduces the quality sorely lacking from other turntables at a lower price point, with its solid wooden plinth and top-quality cartridge. This one offers serious bass response for a belt-driven design.

TOYS

Turntables featuring a combination of phono amp, Bluetooth and USB port extras…

BUDGET UP TO £250

LENCO
L-3808

PRICE £200

WWW.LENCOUK.COM

A very attractive price and it sounds terrific – for a design that features both a built-in phono amplifier and USB port, that is. Because of its direct-drive mechanism, there's plenty of precision and focus, with great bass performance. A popular choice.

MIDRANGE £250-£500

SONY
PS-HX500

PRICE £350

WWW.SONY.CO.UK

The headline feature of this twin-speed, belt-driven turntable is its ability to rip vinyl to DSD-quality files (although some have questioned whether it's true DSD) as well as WAV; a USB port and a built-in phono amp are also featured. The basic turntable offers admirable sound quality.

HIGH-END £500+

ELIPSON
OMEGA 100 RIAA BT CARBON BLACK

PRICE £699

WWW.AVOKE.CO.UK

There's plenty of quality on show, including a carbon-fibre arm and a carbon-fibre plinth. Inside is a phono amplifier, USB port and Bluetooth – the entire set! Sound quality for this configuration is pretty darned good, too.

AUDIOPHILE

Turntables designed for optimum sound quality…

BUDGET UP TO £250

REGA
PLANAR 1

PRICE £248

WWW.REGA.CO.UK

Be aware – the Planar 1 is actually better than the older RP1 – although the latter is excellent, too. The sound here is superb, yes, but the basic design, parts quality and easy installation play a significant role in making this a highly recommended buy.

MIDRANGE £250-£500

PRO-JECT
DEBUT III S AUDIOPHILE

PRICE £325

WWW.HENLEYAUDIO.CO.UK

The Debut III S Audiophile uses many parts from the Debut Carbon, plus separate phono cables and good-quality isolating feet. It also has an Ortofon Pick it 25 A cartridge: a souped-up OM10. Its sound is lovely: low noise, a confident soundstage and meaty bass.

HIGH-END £500+

THE FUNK FIRM
GETT!

PRICE £607

THEFUNKFIRM.CO.UK

Created by the man who was behind the famous Pink Triangle turntables of yore, the Gett! is packed with innovation – with its threaded arm and motor location – and oozes sound quality. You will need to buy a cartridge, though.

DREAM MACHINES

TECHNICS SL-1000R

UPDATED FLAGSHIP TURNTABLE DESIGN

£14,000 *www.technics.com/uk*

In our series showcasing high-end hi-fi to die for, **Paul Rigby** investigates Technics' new version of a turntable that's been relied upon by the radio industry for years…

Technics' 3-speed SL-1000R (the R stands for Reference) improves on the excellent SP-10R, with an outer platter encasing the power supply and up to three arms, including a slightly longer and improved 10" Technics variant. Technics' top-of-the-range model and a contender for the best direct-drive turntable in the world, it features superlative engineering that takes the direct-drive philosophy to new territory, highlighted by the 7kg platter formed from a multi-material sandwich, which removes noise, improving sound quality. The motor, utilising stator coils, was designed for the SP-10R; it uses two sets of coils and twin rotors, increasing torque. ●

1 MAJOR LASER
The heavy platter was subject to a range of laser-based vibration testing

2 TRIPLE HEADER
The SL-1000R can hold a total of three arms to feature different types of cartridges

3 ARMED & DANGEROUS
This arm is based on the SL-1200G's magnesium build but features a 10" tube instead of a 9" variant with improved bearings

4 POWER PLAY
The power-supply box (not pictured) allows you to alter the speed and pitch. In use, the pitch-speed variants are displayed on a readout on the power supply

1
2
3
Technics
ortofon

TECHNICS SL-1200G

REDESIGNED DIRECT-DRIVE TURNTABLE

£2,999 *www.technics.com*

Resplendent in its shiny, strobe-fringed splendour, **Paul Rigby** gets to grips with a living legend and reviews the Technics SL-1200G…

When the SL-1200G turntable was announced, I can't recall any other turntable being more eagerly anticipated, and I certainly can't remember another one prompting anywhere near the same levels of media coverage and excited public attention.

Which is, no doubt, where all the confusion has come from – because this is not a 1200, despite the outer skin telling you otherwise. The SL-1200G might look like the classic SL-1200 design, and it even operates in a similar way; but that, it seems, is intentional, even though it does trigger some issues.

Technics have created a new turntable here: one that offers superb design and engineering credentials. If that new engineering had been implemented into a brand-new design, then the price would have skyrocketed. Double the price, maybe? Also, Technics have the staff available who know how to build an SL-1200. They've been doing it for around 45 years, don't forget; this speeds up production.

Finally, if you're going to release a new product, would you spurn 45 years' worth of marketing and PR gold and change the basic turntable format? No. Hence, the SL-1200G sports a similar name and chassis, but it's not really an SL-1200.

All of this information is important for any evaluation of the SL-1200G, if you're thinking of buying one.

The turntable spans 453x173x 372mm, weighs in at a hefty 18kg and sits on isolating foot structures. The arm tube on the SL-1200G is made from magnesium; it's a lightweight structure, but rigid, which puts more focus on the good-quality bearings used.

The platter is heavy and arrives with a brass top plate, with rubber underneath to enhance its inert nature. The turntable also includes a completely new direct-drive motor system that removes the stator cogging, which was an issue with the original design. There's also a new, accurate digital speed-control system, eliminating any threat of wow and flutter.

The next important thing to remember is that the SL-1200G is not a finished

The three-layer platter has a deadening rubber rear surface, to reduce resonance

turntable. Yes, you can take the turntable out of the box, hook it up to your hi-fi and it will make a noise – and many will be happy with that. But if you care about sound quality, you will notice drawbacks.

UNLOCK THE POTENTIAL

Attaching an Ortofon 2M Black MM cartridge (£475), I played Gary Numan's reissued *Dance* LP and heard lots of potential: a broad soundstage, some midrange insight and emotive vocals – but they were outweighed by issues such as constricted treble, pinched mids and uncontrolled bass.

After further experimentation, I've concluded that, with the SL-1200G, Technics are effectively giving you a starter kit. You need to unlock its potential – it will not provide optimum results out of the box. This is a £3,000 turntable, after all, and it comes with a basic headshell, throwaway mat, kettle mains lead and a pair of bootlaces for interconnects. The conclusion screams at you. And that conclusion is? Once I had upgraded the cartridge to an Ortofon Cadenza Bronze (£1,400), added a HRS ADL stabiliser to slide over the platter spindle (£250), new cork/rubber platter mat (£25), new ebony headshell (£150), new interconnects (£945) and new Black Rhodium Stream mains cable (£450) then – and only then – did the turntable's full potential emerge.

WITH THE SL-1200G, TECHNICS ARE EFFECTIVELY GIVING YOU A STARTER KIT. YOU NEED TO UNLOCK ITS POTENTIAL – IT WILL NOT PROVIDE OPTIMUM RESULTS OUT OF THE BOX

Noise dropped significantly, adding focus to the bass, opening up the mids, relaxing the treble, introducing space into the soundstage and more.

If sound quality is of overriding importance to you and you have the necessary funds, then buy the Technics SL-1200G and then save up another £3,000 to get the best out of it. The finished article is quite superb and it's well worth the effort. The 'G' offers something different to the usual belt-drive high-end decks out there, providing a fast-paced, beautifully implemented turntable. It gives you a smooth, almost 'solid state' effect, with plenty of pace and transient speed and devastating manoeuvrability. If you want this end result, though, you have to give the turntable the respect it deserves. ●

VERDICT

PROS

MIDRANGE INSIGHT
PACE
BASS MOBILITY
CLASSIC DESIGN
BUILD

CONS

AFTER PURCHASE, THERE'S STILL WORK TO BE DONE

SCORE
30/33⅓

The SL-1200G has a redesigned direct-drive motor system

VPI PRIME SIGNATURE
HIGH-END AUDIOPHILE TURNTABLE

£6,000 *0131 555 3922 www.vpiindustries.com*

Released as the upgraded sequel to the popular Prime model, **Paul Rigby** reviews VPI's Prime Signature turntable…

Touted as an upgrade to the company's own Prime turntable, the Signature version is a heavy beast, clocking in at a massive 36.75kg with a sturdy, vinyl-wrapped polymer plinth base that acts as a sandwich for a thick piece of aluminium that slices through the centre. Other shiny bits come in the form of the chrome-coated covers that cap the isolating feet.

Also very heavy is the separate motor that combines aluminium and steel – again, perfect for damping and a reduction in vibration. This unit holds the pulley for the belt. Changing the speed involves moving the belt from one pulley groove to another. Some might baulk at having to change speed at all in this way, considering the price paid for the Signature, but I'd like to trust the designer on this. If the reason is to lower noise or to free up the build budget for more audiophile parts, I'm all for that.

Moving to the other side of the plinth, the JMW-10-3DR arm is 3D printed in design. This unipivot includes high-quality Nordost Reference wiring.

The 300rpm, 24-pole, AC-synchronous motor is installed in a separate aluminium-and-steel machined assembly, while the inverted bearing features a hardened stainless-steel shaft, 60 Rockwell chrome-hardened ball, spinning in a phosphor bronze bushing, and sits on a PEEK thrust disc.

Installing the turntable is hardly plug-and-go. There are a number of steps to follow and care must be taken with each and every one of them but, really, VPI has done a great job here to hand-hold the user through each one. Even when setting up your third-party cartridge, VPI supplies a very nicely designed jig that offers a pretty fool-proof method of getting it right. Also, despite the company's approach to anti-skate force application (VPI doesn't like dedicated anti-skate applicators and would rather apply it by twisting the tonearm connection wire, which applies a force on the arm), it does offer two different methods for those who might disagree with doing it this way.

Other features that put a smile on my face include the high positioning of the RCA/earth

connectors behind the arm (I'm so used to hunting for these connectors either under the plinth, or within a cave-like part of it); changing the VTA is very easy using the large rotary selector on the arm board. I could go on…

I played a mixture of Gary Numan and Dusty Springfield during sound tests and the turntable was always in control of all frequencies. The soundstage offered order and organisation, with no hint of midrange smearing or bass bloom.

RAREFIED AIR

This didn't translate into constriction of dynamics. These were stretched during vocal performances, while cymbal taps offered a welcome fragility and bass guitar was firm and responsive.

What impressed me about the midrange was the careful use of space.

WHAT IMPRESSED ME ABOUT THE MIDRANGE WAS THE CAREFUL USE OF SPACE. SPACE AROUND THE SOUNDSTAGE ALLOWS INSTRUMENTS ROOM TO MANOEUVRE

Space around the soundstage is a good thing, because it gives instruments room to manoeuvre, allowing the ear to experience the full personality of the instrument in action.

The VPI gives you this, but never too much – hence, there's never an over-emphasis on air and open space, so you never get a confusion of reverb, which is the opposite end of the issue. You get enough room and micro-reverb to enhance the naturalistic stance of an instrument, then we're off to the next bit. This pace is important; music never feels stodgy.

This is a very strong and sturdy design, which offers an almost perfect layout (swap the included stabiliser with a HRS ADL or similar, though, to enhance the sonics). Sound quality is very impressive, because it blends tonal accuracy with a dynamic freedom, and a focused soundstage with an open clarity. In effect, with the VPI Prime Signature, you get the best of all worlds. ●

The upgraded JMW 3D-10 Reference arm has a metallic black gloss finish, with Nordost Reference wire

VERDICT

PROS	CONS
BASS	STABILISER
IMPLEMENTATION	
BUILD	
INSTALLATION	
DESIGN	
MIDRANGE	
INSIGHT	

SCORE

32/33 1/3

MASTER & DYNAMIC MW50

WIRELESS HEADPHONES

£399 *www.masterdynamic.co.uk*

John Pickford tests a set of luxurious on-ear wireless headphones engineered for listening to music on the move…

A short while ago, I tested Master & Dynamic's MH30 headphones, finding them excellent both in performance and build quality. Recently, I've been enjoying the company's MW50 wireless model. Like the passive MH30s, the wireless model is a supra-aural (on ear) design, constructed to a high standard using premium-grade materials. Avoiding unnecessary use of plastics, the MW50s employ stainless steel and aluminium for the casework, foldable hinges and antennae, along with heavy-grain cowhide for the headband exterior and lambskin for the earpads.

Unlike the retro-industrial look of the 30s, the MW50s' design is more elegant and better suited for mobile use. Sturdy, yet lightweight at 240g, the 'phones are snug and comfy – even for smaller-headed people such as myself – making lengthy listening sessions a pleasure. Unusually, the business ends of the earcups are covered completely in lambskin, not just the foam surrounds, with perforated leather covering the drivers. As for the drivers themselves, the diaphragm is made from Beryllium – an expensive high-performance material used for some high-end loudspeaker tweeters and not in other M&D models. On the left earcup is a switch to make the 'phones active, while the right earcup has three push buttons that control volume level and track selection, and even facilitate answering (or rejecting) a telephone call.

The MW50s may not be cheap, but they're one of the best options in their class

On test, the MW50s' wireless performance is spot-on, both in terms of battery life (16 hours) and signal range, while the absence of cables is a revelation if you've never before experienced wireless headphones. Passive performance is possible, however, with the supplied 1.25m cable. Sound-wise, the MW50s exhibit M&D's "signature rich, warm sound" that I heard in the MH30s. However, those Beryllium drivers reveal even more detail, with a wider tonal palette than the 30s. Treble response is judged nicely with no fizziness at the highest frequencies, while the upper midrange/lower treble is smooth, avoiding sibilance and never sounding over-exposed. The bottom end – including the lower midrange – is fulsome, albeit tuneful and reasonably taut. This can make some overcooked rock tracks sound a bit tubby; however, the absence of one-note boom makes basslines easy to follow.

This was demonstrated perfectly on The Beatles' *Penny Lane*, with its prominent melodic bassline. I could hear subtle use of vibrato, while a single bowed low double-bass note in the final verse revealed that the MW50s can produce real low end cleanly when it's present on a recording.

Acoustic music was well served, too, with Hammond organist Jimmy Smith's *The Cat* sounding open and natural. Stereo imaging isn't as expansive as I've experienced with high-end over-ear designs; however, I could still get a good impression of the natural acoustics of the recording studio.

The MW50s are quite near the top of the game for on-ear headphones and this is reflected in the price; they're not cheap.

They're a luxurious product, though, built to last and with a well-ordered sound presentation. Certainly worth auditioning if music on the move is a priority. ●

VERDICT

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The Vinylist

RICH HORTON

Reader **Rich Horton** began his record-collecting adventures with a pre-glam-rock stomper from Slade, then expanded his listening tastes out through the genres over the years. But like the rest of us, he still remembers The One That Got Away…

To be in with a chance of seeing your record collection in *Long Live Vinyl*, email your details and a picture to gary.walker@anthem-publishing.com

What was the first record that you bought?
"The first record I bought was *Get Down And Get With It* by Slade in 1972, from Tudor Records. It was a shop in Muswell Hill and I was nine years old."

Which artists and genres are you most interested in?
"In the 1960s, it was mainly The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. Then, in the 70s, I got into all the glam bands (Queen, Mott The Hoople and Sparks). Then, after that, it was mainly punk and metal that I was interested in. Over the years, I discovered reggae and country. Then into the 90s, I got into the American alternative scene, then Britpop, Northern Soul and easy listening. I also worked in a London Club for 23 years, which broadened my musical tastes."

How many records do you have?
"My collection consists of about 4,000 albums and 1,000 singles."

What's the most valuable record in your collection?
"That would have to be *D'yer Mak'er* by Led Zeppelin, the UK demo from 1973."

What's the Holy Grail record that you'd most like to own?
"I would love to own a copy of the Sex Pistols' *God Save The Queen* on A&M. I nearly bought a copy in 1990 for £500…"

What's your listening setup?
"I've actually got quite a basic setup – a Cambridge Audio Topaz AM10 amp and a Teac TN-200 deck." ●

Janis Ian

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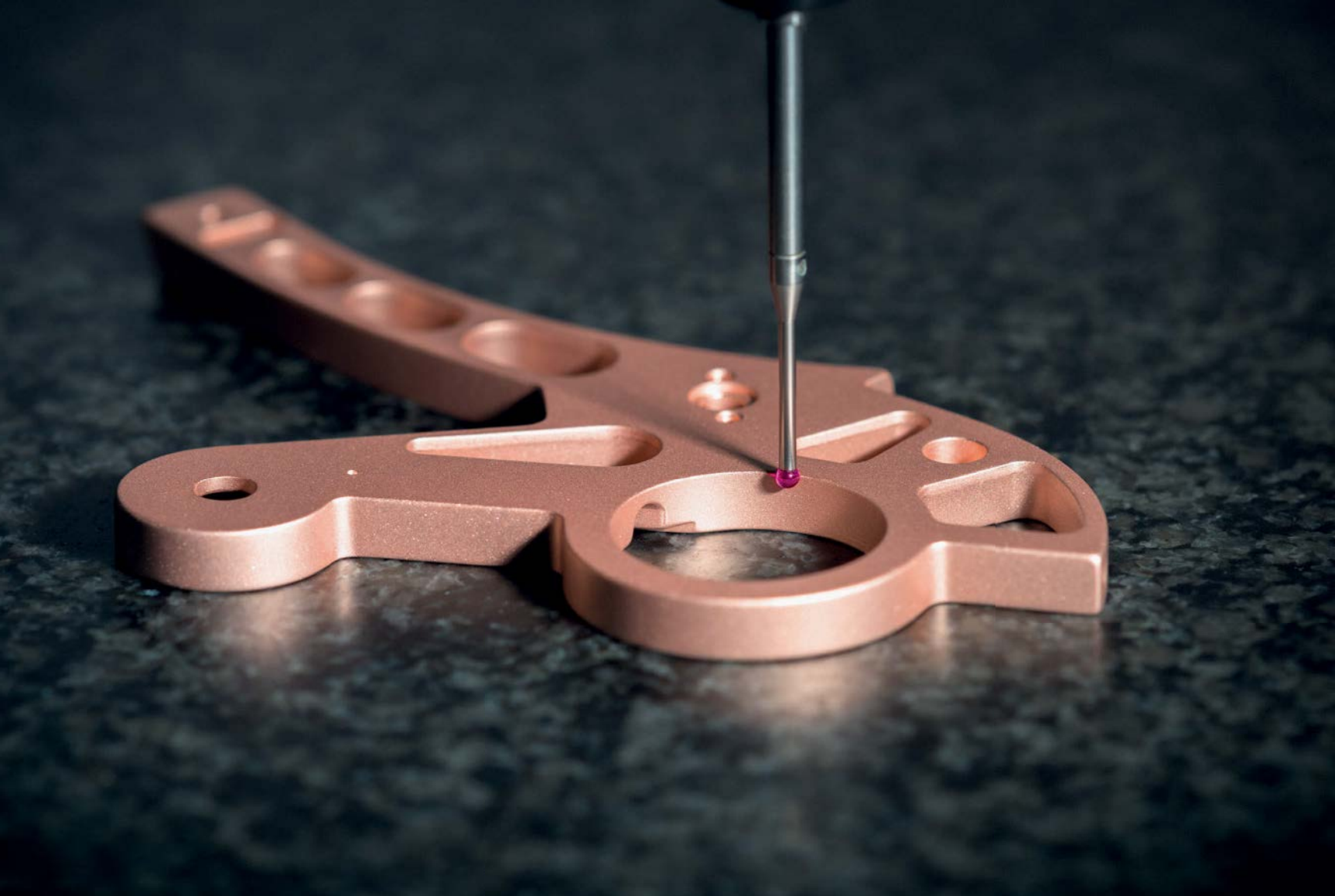

SME *Precision*

This is the control mount for an SME 300 series tonearm. It holds the arm lift and anti-skate controls. A simple task but still deserving an extraordinary part.

Precision engineered in-house from a specially-selected metal alloy, it is meticulously crafted to minimise weight and resonance. Check measurements confirm dimensions to fractions of the width of a human hair.

SME believes that each component in their tonearms and turntables must be the very best it can be, regardless of how minor its role. This absolute dedication has won the highest praise from reviewers around the world.

Isn't it time you listened to an SME?

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